This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

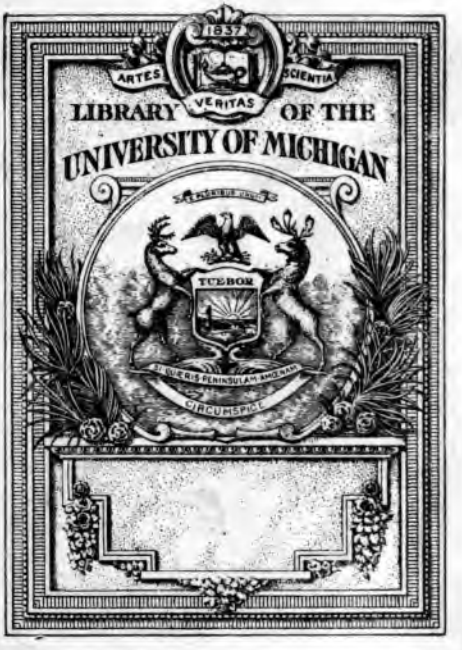
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

A 867,808

MICHAIL ■
GOURAKIN

LAPPO ■ ■ ■ ■
DANILEVESKAYA


1837
ARTES
SCIENTIA
VERITAS
LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
TUEBOR
CIRCUMSPICE

Michail
Gourakin

MICHAIL GOURAI

The Heart of a Russian

by

LAPPO-DANILEVESKAYA

NEW YORK
ROBERT M. McBRIDE & COMPANY
1917

COPYRIGHT, 1917, BY
ROBERT M. MCBRIDE & CO.

PUBLISHED 1917

THE HEART OF A RUSSIAN

PART ONE

I

"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

"HAS His Excellency returned from his walk?"

An austere-looking and grey-haired valet stood at the door of the study.

"Tell the Prince, Tikhon, that I urgently ask him to receive me directly."

"Yes, sir."

The valet softly closed the heavy doors behind him and proceeded to the apartments of the Prince through the long suite of rooms. On remaining alone, the very young officer, who had been sitting before his morning cup of coffee, rose hastily, and, lighting a cigarette and nervously shrugging his shoulders, began to walk up and down the room. Without his uniform, in his shirt of finest linen and black tie over his collar, with dark brown hair, splendid blue eyes, and aquiline nose, Michail Gourakin was undoubtedly the handsomest and most dashing officer in the Guards. A small moustache could not hide the soft contour of his mouth. The height, figure, movements—all were impressed with nobility and harmony. After only a couple of pulls at his cigarette he threw it on the floor with an impatient movement, and with a frown took up his uniform coat, which was laid out ready for him, and began putting it on before a looking-glass.

"*Que diable!*" he grumbled through his teeth, and pulled at the sleeve, the lining of which had been caught by his

319490

stud. Having freed his hand, he arranged his tie, passed his hand over his smoothly combed hair, gave a touch to his moustache, and was just going to finish his coffee when someone knocked at the door.

"Come in." Michail turned and put his cup of coffee back without touching it with his lips.

"You are expected."

The same valet stood in the doorway with an impenetrable expression on his face.

"Is the Prince alone?" asked Gourakin.

"He is."

The valet stepped aside to allow Michail to pass. On remaining alone he picked up the still smoking cigarette, shook his head in grave rebuke, felt the carpet on the spot where it had lain, and, moving his lips and whispering to himself, went out.

With his light youthful step, his spurs clanking, Michail entered the spacious study of his uncle. A General in the suite of the Emperor, he was seated in a deep armchair in undress uniform, his long legs, showing his enormous height, stretched out before him, and was turning over the leaves of a new number of the *Journal de St. Pétersbourg*.

"A-a, good-morning. What has happened to you?" he asked, not looking up from his paper; and moving his meerschaum mouthpiece with the cigarette towards the corner of his mouth, he slowly inhaled the smoke. Michail was silent. Prince Alexei Vassilievitch raised his eyes with an interrogative look, and smiled. The smile made his face look very much like Michail's: the same blue eyes, the same aquiline nose, the same gentle and light-hearted expression, but the Prince's features were larger, and had more character. A peculiarity of his face was the large, projecting chin.

"Well, what is the matter? Money?" asked the Prince again, letting out a long curl of smoke.

Michail, who had sat down in an armchair, rose hastily, and, as if at a loss for words, knitting his eyebrows and closing his eyes, he rubbed his forehead with his fingers.

"Worse, *mon oncle*—much worse. . . . I have come to

ask your advice and support. . . . Help me . . . or rather us."

"*Histoire de femme?*"

Instead of answering Michail gave an affirmative nod.

"Who is it?" asked the Prince, following the curls of smoke with half closed eyes.

"Nathalie Volynskaia."

"A dangerous woman! But I don't see the trouble. It appears that Volynsky is most accommodating, and allows her full liberty."

"She is *enceinte*. . . ."

"A-a-a! . . . That is imprudent. However, I still do not see any cause for drama. Although up to now Volynsky has not taken care to make her a mother, that does not exclude the possibility. . . ."

"It is absolutely excluded: Nathalie has never been the wife of her husband."

"What nonsense!" interrupted the Prince calmly. "I have known Volynsky for a long time, and I know something of his intimate life outside his family. Absolute nonsense!"

"Allow me, *mon oncle*, but I am telling you what I have heard—from Nathalie herself."

"Hm-m! . . . We certainly easily believe interesting women, especially if they love us. Please do not be offended with me; you know yourself that I am the first to be a woman's slave; I do not blame her. But what does she want?"

"It is not a case of what she wants, but I want to make her my wife."

"Do not be hasty, my friend. Evidently this is your first love affair with a respectable woman. . . ."

"Yes, *mon oncle*, you are right."

The Prince, as if considering something, began slowly to light another cigarette.

"The more reason for you not to do anything hastily. Volynskaia, besides being five years older than you, is a capable and not stupid woman. She will know how to deceive her husband, or he will allow himself to be deceived.

All will pass without any scandal, and, believe me, you will keep her as a very good friend."

"I cannot consent to that."

"And she?"

"Neither can she, I think."

"That is to say, you think, or you are sure?"

"She loves me. . . ."

"She is not sixteen years old, to be afraid of a liaison. You see, my boy, you are so huffy that I see quite clearly it is she who desires a divorce. And I will tell you quite seriously that she is wrong to prefer to have you as a husband, instead of keeping you as a lover. Why this scandal? Why should you shock all our world, bring the affair to the notice of the Court, and shame on Volynsky, hurry on the divorce at express speed—you say she is expecting a child—grieve your father and grandmother? . . . I do not understand you, and Nathalie Volynskaia still less. She has an excellent position, a clever and high-placed husband. . . ."

"But I, I myself, *mon oncle*, do not want to play the part of a scoundrel."

The Prince winced.

"Where does the scoundrel come in? You are twenty-one, she is twenty-five. . . . What is it you want from me at last?"

"I ask you, I implore you, go to Baroness Kern—you know what friends she is with Volynsky—and ask her to persuade him to consent to a divorce. Besides, the Duchess loves the Baroness; if we have her on our side, then the Duchess will also say a word or two where necessary for us."

"So . . . I see, you are all on fire. Well, but tell me, has Nathalie Volynskaia told her husband of her state?"

"Yes."

"And what does he say?"

"He agrees: he does not want any scandal."

"And you still desire it! Imprudent. . . . This is what I will tell you, my poor boy: you are aware of what I have been through in my time, so that I can well understand and,

if need be, help you, and I ask you to consider your position calmly; talk it over with someone else, and if in a week's time you have not changed your decision, there is nothing to be done: I will go to Baroness Kern. You will have a difficult time with your father. How do you think?"

"Yes, father does not understand these things—nor many others," sighed Michail.

"You probably want money?" asked the Prince, understanding evidently what Michail meant by "many others."

"N-no, thank you. . . . I did not mean that."

"I know that it is not that. Take some, if you want it. There, on the table, near the inkstand. A Guardsman always needs money; your father seems to forget this."

Michail left the Prince's study soon after, and, passing a long row of reception-rooms, descended a small staircase. Without knocking he entered the private apartments of the young Prince, with whom he had grown up since he was a child of nine years old, and who was now serving in the same regiment. Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, the young Prince was just getting up and was hurrying to dress, grumbling and scolding. His valet was rushing about from side to side, picking up the different things that the impatient hand of the young Prince was throwing down on the floor, handing him one object and another, trying to guess his wishes, and patiently and meekly submitting to his scoldings and blame.

"Give me the gold studs. . . . Not those. . . . I tell you, not those. What a donkey you are! You can never understand at once. Cigarettes! Where are you putting them, d—— you!"

The young Prince's flow of angry words was interrupted by Michail's entrance.

"The train starts in forty minutes. You are coming to Peterhof, Serguei?"

"Certainly. Wait for me. That unlicked bear-cub has no idea of his duties—makes one angry from early morning."

"What's the use of worrying!" Michail shrugged his

shoulders as he stood before a glass and smoothed his small, well cared for moustache.

Prince Serguei was like his father in figure and somewhat in features. In his temper he resembled his mother: he was often and easily irritated, very despotic, and from his infancy showed a love of authority.

Soon he was ready, and the two young Guardsmen, exchanging a few hurried sentences, clanking their spurs and broad swords, ran down the marble staircase, covered with a red velvet carpet, into the hall, where an austere-looking and stately old porter in red livery emblazoned with the arms of the family, respectfully handed them their cloaks and threw open before them the heavy bronze-covered doors. The frosty air filled the young lungs with its quickening breath, and gave an additional colour to the fresh young faces.

At the same time Princess Anna Valerianovna, the wife of Prince Alexei Vassilievitch, was in her working-room, which was handsomely, though coldly, furnished in Karelian birch. Standing before a large round table, she was rapidly overhauling neatly folded parcels of children's underclothing. Her fat white hands with the short fingers were taking up each piece, turning it inside and out, feeling the seams and buttons, and afterwards passing it over to a short, middle-aged lady with tightly folded thin lips and a sharp sly look in her faded eyes, who was standing near her at the same table.

"How much calico is there remaining from last year?" asked the Princess.

"Over two hundred *arshins*."

"Ah, how slowly those girls work! Tell them, Olga Onisimovna, that they must work more diligently."

"I will tell them, Your Excellency."

"Are the stoves in good order?"

"All have been repaired."

"About the storehouses—I have already given my instructions to Peter Semenovitch. The supplies can be transferred to some place for a time. And besides, Olga Onisimovna, the reception of relatives must be limited.

Last time when I was there, there were some women in the hall. What do they want on work days?"

"They had arrived from afar, Your Excellency, by special request. . . ."

"Unnecessary. . . . Quite unnecessary. Let the children study and work. No relatives on work days. Only spoiling them."

"Your Excellency, Kishkina is in the hospital again; again eczema and abscesses."

"Ah, what a bother with her!" The Princess made a grimace of disgust. "She is an unclean, nasty child. What does Karl Edwardovitch say?"

"He advised that she be sent to the country for a couple of months."

"Very well. I will write to him. And now take this away and tell the children that if they have not finished the work by the holidays I will be very displeased."

The Princess was just moving away, but remarking that Olga Onisimovna had something to say, she stopped before her.

"What is it? Speak."

"It is about Dashenka, Your Excellency."

"Again about her?"

The Princess shrugged her shoulders impatiently, and a contemptuous smile showed itself on her broad vulgar face, with its thick lips and narrow eyes almost without eyelashes.

"Dashenka has been offered a place of lady's maid, Your Excellency—forty-five roubles a month all found, the salary to be increased every year if she will undertake fine sewing."

"What nonsense! What lady's maid! To whom is it?"

"To the Golovins."

"No, no, this is nonsense! She wants to play the young lady. An orphan without house or home—she has nothing to do in the 'world.' She will only have her head turned there. She must marry. Afanassiy is a good *moujik*, he will not beat her; I will give her a dowry and a separate cottage. Let her superintend the poultry-yard in Slavianka. Tell me, please, what better can one want?"

The Princess's small sharp eyes moved rapidly and maliciously, and she tugged nervously at the tie under the starched collar of her blouse.

"She is so young, Your Excellency, only nineteen; a good girl — the favourite of the whole school," Olga Onisimovna interceded softly.

"But not too young to go into service to strangers? Nonsense, nonsense!"

"She has finished a four-class school, Your Excellency, and to marry a common peasant . . ."

"Tell me, please, and is she not a common peasant herself?" the Princess cried angrily, and as if struck with astonishment she dropped into an armchair, and fixing Olga Onisimovna with a severe gaze, which the other bore unflinchingly, she was silent several seconds.

"I founded the school, not to make young ladies of common peasant girls," she continued, leaning her hands on the arms of the chair and still severely gazing at the head-mistress of the school. "I feed, dress and teach them so that they could return to their homes and be useful there; and we have too many young ladies without them. Ring the bell, Olga Onisimovna."

A minute later a slim young girl, with dark eyes and hair and a pretty colour coming and going on her cheeks, entered and stopped near the door in an attitude of respect.

"Take these things away," the Princess addressed her in a dry and authoritative voice. "Olga Onisimovna has told me of your wish to enter the service of the Golovins. . . ."

"Your Excellency——" the young girl faltered timidly.

"Silence! I will not allow that. You are to prep your trousseau and marry Afanassiy. You may just all nonsense out of your head."

"Your Excellency, I implore you . . ." the young faltered again, ready to cry, and taking a step into the ro

"Put these things away!" the Princess repeated wit looking at her. The Princess rose from her chair, sh as a stout woman with broad shoulders and smoo hair tightly bound up in a knot on the top of her he stepping heavily without turning round, she left th

In her bedroom, on a blue satin sofa, there lay a nun's black dress and head-dress. Having put these on and taken up her beads, the Princess, with an austere and devoted expression on her face, passed her *salon* and study and entered a small, half dark oratory; there she trimmed the light of a lamp hanging before the ikons, and, sinking down heavily on her knees, remained so, whispering prayers and counting her beads, for over an hour, until a clock striking in the neighbouring room reminded her that it was time to go to lunch.

II

MME. GOURAKINA, Michail's grandmother, a well-preserved, stately, majestic-looking old lady, with smooth grey hair divided by a broad parting and covered with a cap of Chantilly lace, very straight backed, clad in black, which she always wore since the death of her husband, was sitting in the dark red drawing-room, her feet, encased in slippers with cork soles and high French heels, to add to her low stature, reposing on a footstool. Armed with a long crochet-hook she was busy at her invariable work—knitting woollen scarves for the poor. Opposite to her, at the same table covered with a dark red plush table-cover, sat her daughter Marie, an unmarried lady of thirty-five years, short-sighted and inclined to stoutness, very modestly dressed, her book, "War and Peace," out of which she was reading aloud, lying on the table before her. Without taking her eyes off her book she now and then stretched out her hand and caught the large ball of blue wool which rolled to the edge of the table and threatened to fall. The lamp, under a dark blue shade, threw a bright circle of light on the table, upon the book lying there, and the rolling ball of wool, leaving the faces of the old lady and her daughter, Marie Gourakina, in a pleasant soft shadow.

"'Suddenly there was a movement,'" read Marie Gourakina in her low contralto voice; "'the crowd began to talk, swayed, moved asunder, and between two rows of people, at the sound of music, the Emperor appeared. . . .'"

"What a fine man he was!" said old Gourakina as if speaking to herself.

Her daughter stopped her reading respectfully.

"He was handsomer than Emperor Alexander II.?" asked Marie in French, as it was the custom to speak in their house.

"Emperor Alexander I. was charming—*c'était un charmeur;* the ladies went mad about him. Emperor Alexander II. fascinates by his kindness, *sa bonté divine.* He is not understood—many do not understand him," said Gourakina with a kind of reproach and solemn respect in her voice, as she unrolled a skein of wool from her ball and let it fall to the ground. Marie waited another second, and, seeing that her mother was prepared to listen, resumed her reading. In the neighbouring room the clank of spurs was heard, and Michail appeared at the door, his young face reddened by the frost, and bringing with him a stream of cold winter air. Holding his sword with one hand and bending low in respect, he kissed the warm soft hand of his grandmother, and was just going to do the same to his aunt when she as usual kissed him on the lips. A kindly smile shone on her face at the sight of her beloved nephew.

"Why did not you come to dinner?" asked Mme. Gourakina, without taking her eyes off her work.

"Excuse me, *grand'maman.* I hope my note was not late? There was a *folle journée* to-day at the Duchess's, and I foresaw that I would not be able to come."

"Was it gay?"

"Very animated."

"Who of the interesting ladies were there?" asked Marie, who had never liked, and now never visited, social gatherings, although, owing to her mother's position at the Court, she could well have done so.

"There were many. . . . Mme. Naryshkina was very pretty, Bezobrazova, the daughter of the English Ambassador, *la petite* Niniche Ogareff . . .

"Was Volynskaia there?" asked Gourakina, with a momentary sharp glance at her grandson.

"Yes, she was . . ." Michail blushed suddenly, and, angry with himself, frowned and began twirling his moustache.

"With her husband?" the old lady continued her interrogatory.

"I think so . . . although, no. . . ."

Wishing to change the subject, Michail launched into a

brilliant description of some festivities that had been held in his regiment, carrying away with him Marie, who was always greatly interested and willing to take to heart anything that had any relation to the life of her nephew, whom she worshipped for his handsome looks, his kind heart, and unrestrained, generous, expansive nature. Old Gourakina always severely blamed this last quality aloud, but in her heart of hearts she loved her grandson just as he was.

"I had a letter from your father one of these days," the old lady interrupted her grandson's story. "He complains of his health. He writes that he is tired of life. He has become quite a forest bear. He asks about you; you have been writing much more seldom lately; that is not right."

The servant came to announce that the tea-urn was served, and Marie rose from her place.

"You will wait for us in the dining-room, Marie; I have a few words to say to Misha."

Marie looked at her mother with a slight feeling of anxiety. She knew how spare she was of her words, how seldom she rebuked anyone, and if she had to say "a few words," it generally meant something serious. Grown up under the despotic rule of her mother, whom she deeply respected and loved, but even now slightly feared and most implicitly obeyed, sacrificing all her own inclinations to her mother's will, Marie had become deeply attached to her baby nephew Misha, whom her mother had brought home from his father's after the death of the latter's wife at the child's birth. During nine years the boy grew up under the wing of his kind aunt, who was a merry young girl at the time, going out in society with her eldest sister, but always ready to give up balls and parties for a chance of enjoying a romp with the lively little fellow and putting him to bed herself.

It was Marie who undertook to conduct the first lessons in reading, writing and music, and they served to attach her still more to the child.

But quite unexpectedly the father's decision put an end to Marie's joys. Acceding to the prayers of his late wife's kinsman, Prince Alexei Vassilievitch, Michail's father gave

him his son, recognizing that to let him grow up under exclusively womanly rule might be prejudicial to him.

Out of the strictly patriarchal atmosphere surrounding the stately old Mme. Gourakina, and the motherly tenderness of his Aunt Marie, Michail passed into the sumptuous house of Prince Alexei Vassilievitch, where he found tutors, masters, and a comrade to play with—naughty, nervous, and not always kind little Prince Serguei. The Princess used to be present daily at some of the lessons. She entered into the life of the boys, but she exercised no influence on either of them, whereas the Prince, who saw them much less frequently, at once gained the heart of lively little Machail, full of fun and frolic. As the years rolled by he became the favourite of the whole house, and now Prince Alexei Vassilievitch would not hear of his living anywhere but at his house. Notwithstanding their separation, the relations between the aunt and nephew had remained the same, and no one could sympathize with Michail so thoroughly as his Aunt Marie, whom he loved with a selfish, but nevertheless deep and sincere love. She would never think of criticizing her mother's words or actions; however, in all that concerned her nephew she always took his part in her heart; often shed tears on his account, and avoided her mother when the latter was displeased with her grandson. Now, passing into the dining-room, she put some tea into the Chinese teapot and mechanically, her thoughts elsewhere, poured some water on it out of the silver urn. Not a word reached her from the corner drawing-room, which was separated from the dining-room by a *salon* and a reception-room; and, with an anxious shake of the head, she took a strip of embroidery work out of her pocket, and, bending low over it, commenced to embroider in white the little leaves and circles traced in blue on the linen.

Meanwhile Gourakina continued to work several minutes in silence.

This silence, which seemed intentional to Michail, made him feel very uncomfortable; he knew what his severe old grandmother wanted to talk about. Bracing himself up to be calm and self-assured, he got out his cigarette case, but,

remembering suddenly that smoking was not allowed in her presence, he began playing with it, holding it between two fingers and twirling it round.

"Baroness Kern was here yesterday. . . ."

At these words something seemed to clutch at Michail's heart. He had not been mistaken: a difficult explanation lay before him.

"And she repeated to me the conversation which she had had a few days ago with Prince Alexei Vassilievitch. . . . You certainly understand of what I am speaking?" added the old lady, after a short pause, going on with her work and not looking at her grandson.

Michail, inwardly agitated, but not showing it, except by the aimless removing of his cigarette case from one pocket to another, was trying to gather his thoughts and seeking for the best expressions which would be most efficient in this case.

"A great misfortune has happened, *grand'maman*. . . . God has willed it. . . ."

Gourakina laid her work down on her lap and, raising her eyebrows impressively, gazed with severe eyes full into the youth's confused and changing face.

"Not a misfortune, my friend, but looseness, depravity. How can you seek to defend yourself by calling it God's will? You sin doubly. . . . And now, as I hear, you intend to marry her?" The word "her" was pronounced with marked contempt.

"Certainly."

"Oh, how self-assured you are in your actions! You say 'certainly,' not noticing that your decision has not been sufficiently thought out. . . ."

"I have considered it thoroughly."

"No, please, do not interrupt me, my friend, and hear me out in what I feel it my duty to tell you. You have both acted against the laws of morality, which I have always tried to instil in you, and against God's commandments. Without excusing your fault I still blame her more. Besides being older than you by five years, she is a married woman, and she had to guard not only her own, but also her hus-

band's honour. But even as a girl she was not distinguished by her modesty. What did she expect, what could she count on, when she plunged into such depravity? On the support of the Duchess, who, for all the respect we owe her, has very light views on life? But believe me, my boy, the families who care for their honour will not receive you. It is depravity and a scandal to society."

Gourakina, her hands folded on her lap, with a slight trembling of a corner of her mouth—which was a sure sign of agitation with her—her dark broad eyebrows raised high, did not once remove her penetrating gaze from Michail's face.

"It is all decided now, *grand'maman*. Nathalie has confessed to her husband. . . ."

"That is not true! It is a lie! It was not she who confessed, but he spoke to her about it. I know this for certain. She was deceiving him silently, and now she is deceiving you, because a freak has taken her to become the wife of a boy-horseguardsman. Her husband is so generous and kind that he is willing to keep her with him, to give his name to the shameful consequences of her depravity and . . ."

"But that would be dastardly."

"Well, you are quite, quite a child! You cannot understand, evidently, that any other man would have cast her out without a word, after having beaten her half dead. He would have been in the right, and she has deserved it. In my time, my boy, women were horsewhipped for being naughty, and they could complain to no one, because they feared their husbands. She should have gone down before him on her knees, asking his forgiveness, meekly bearing the weight of her shame, praying God—and what is she doing? But will you be allowed to marry? You must think of that first."

"Nathalie hopes that the Duchess will help us."

"Please do not dare to pronounce that woman's name in my house. I forbid it. How were you not ashamed to plunge into such mire? What have you prepared for yourself? What a blow you are striking at your father! To

marry a woman whom your family refuses to acknowledge! What a dishonour to your name! You should think more of the fair fame of your shield, which has always been held spotless. Don't rush on without stopping to think; perhaps she herself may be brought to reason, and will see rightly."

"But there is no time to wait, *grand'maman*. She—she is . . ."

"I know, I know! . . . Don't say it, don't repeat it before me. A scandal, certainly a scandal! Let her go abroad. Any other woman in her place would be glad to hide herself, and she goes to *folles journées!* . . . Think better of it, my boy, think better, and do not persuade her to go against the will of her husband; do not strike such a blow to your family."

The old lady folded her work into a large pompadour bag, and, throwing the cords over her arm, pushed her chair back, and, moving silently with her soft soles on the parquet, holding her head high, her silk dress rustling, proceeded to the dining-room. Behind her came Michail, knitting his brows and biting his moist red lips, with a disturbed expression on his face. Marie, after the first glance at her mother and Michail, understood that something serious and unpleasant had passed between them.

Pouring out the tea and trying to keep up the conversation, she kept throwing encouraging glances at Michail, but he avoided them and sat frowning, biting his underlip and hardly answering when spoken to. The old Englishwoman, Miss Jones, who had brought up all the Gourakin children, and who had now come down to tea, seemed not to notice anything, and continued to butter a large piece of bread, also keeping up the general conversation.

Tall, with false hair of a reddish hue, always with a friendly smile for everyone, showing two rows of large white even teeth, she had a habit of constantly putting out and drawing in her lips; she was ever busy, knitting bright yellow, or red, or green woollen scarves for Mme. Gourakina's poor people. Living at ease, always with the Gourakin family, and concentrating all her energies in the

feeding of her own strong and muscular body, she never seemed to notice anything that happened in the house, or perhaps she pretended not to notice it, and only knew and spoke of such things as had been told her. Therefore no one ever minded her presence.

"Very good butter," she remarked to no one in particular, drawing in her lips and laying a thick piece on her bread.

"It is from the country, Miss Jones," answered Mme. Gourakina in English.

"Yes, yes, I know . . .," said the Englishwoman, smiling and showing her false teeth.

Michail looked at her, and suddenly his frowning face took a merry, mischievous expression. He winked at his aunt and began to move up to Miss Jones all that there was to eat on the table.

"Thank you, thank you," smiled she, and her lips moved still faster in and out, as her eyes ran over all the good things.

After tea Marie, under the pretext of some verses that her nephew had promised to copy for her, called him to her, and as soon as he crossed the threshold of her large, airy, light room, divided by a curtain into a bedroom and a boudoir, she shut the door, and, coming up quite close to him, asked in an agitated whisper, although there was no one to hear them:

"Misha, what has happened? You must tell me everything."

"Is it possible you do not guess, my aunt?"

"No, I don't. . . . Something with your father? Debts?"

Michail shrugged his shoulders with impatience.

"No, no! Nothing of the sort. . . . Nathalie Volynskaia."

"Well, what of Nathalie Volynskaia? Do speak at last."

"I am obliged—obliged, do you understand?—to marry her."

"What are you saying, Misha?"

Marie caught hold of the sleeve of his uniform, and for

several seconds remained silent, with eyes closed in silent despair, shaking her head.

"My poor, poor boy! . . . What a dreadful thing, what a scandal! . . . Is there no other issue then? Sit down here, by my side." She sank down on a low little sofa covered with a bright chintz. "Tell me all—you must know that I will understand all. Does Volynsky demand this?" asked Marie, looking with frightened eyes into her nephew's face.

Michail shook his head.

"Then what is the matter?"

"He is willing to keep everything a secret; it is she who wants a divorce. You must understand, she loves me . . . there will be a child. . . ."

"Yes, yes, I understand . . . well, but you, Misha, do you also love her?"

"Certainly, aunt—certainly."

"And you also insist on a divorce?"

"I must do as she wants."

"Yes, yes . . . I understand. . . . Well, and if she would consent to remain with her husband?"

Marie looked into her nephew's eyes with a searching gaze.

"I will have to submit."

Marie, as if following a certain thought, pressed her hand to her forehead for a second, then drew it back decisively, placed her two palms on her nephew's shoulders, and said slowly:

"Misha, be prudent, I implore you. You love her less than you think you do. Nathalie is capricious and headstrong; it pleased her to see the Duchess protecting your meetings, evidently not suspecting what would come of them. She will not suit you as a wife. . . . You are so young, so inexperienced. . . ."

"Ah no, Aunt Marie, you do not know—she loves me so. . . . What else can I do?"

"Yes, yes, I understand. . . . Yesterday, you see, Baroness Kern came to see mamma. I had just returned from my walk when she was saying good-bye. Now I see

what they had been talking about. Mamma was very much troubled, and repeated several times: 'Persuade her not to spoil his career and to avoid a scandal.' Evidently Baroness Kern was asked to talk to Nathalie. Wait a bit; don't write to your father, give her time to think the matter over."

"But that would be cowardice, aunt. . . ."

"Misha, Misha, you must think of those others who love you and whom you may wound mortally. Mamma will not survive this scandal; your father—he also may fall ill, disinherit you. . . ."

A discreet knock was heard at the door. Marie turned round nervously.

"Who is there?"

"Her Excellency asks you to come to the drawing-room," came the voice of the man-servant from behind the door.

Marie hastily powdered her flushed face and sent her nephew off.

"Go, go quickly. . . . Say you have been copying some verses. . . ."

III

"My dear Nathalie, you are at present in a condition when a person cannot discuss logically; you are disturbed, agitated, you have taken the bit between your teeth. . . . Listen to wise advice, pull yourself together."

Thus spoke Baroness Kern in a low voice. Small, slim, middle-aged, dry, sharp, thin, with a pale sickly face, she was a widow, well received at Court, who, by her coldly correct attitude and rigorously severe censure of anything that was not "*comme il faut*," had managed to conquer, if not universal sympathy, at least universal respect tempered with just a little fear.

"Ah, Baroness, you cannot, you positively cannot understand me. You do not know what I am passing through. It is hell, such torments. . . . Will you take some more tea? Pass me your cup. . . . Oh, how unhappy I am, how I suffer, God alone knows!" replied a young woman, with the flush of agitation on her dark handsome face. She had irregular but very attractive features, bright black eyes, and a hardly perceptible black down on the upper lip of her pretty, capricious mouth. She poured out the boiling water from a silver teapot, served on a low table in a pretty little bonbonnière of a drawing-room.

"You say," continued the young woman, nervously moving her wedding ring up and down her finger, "that Paul is a generous and noble man. I value very highly his kindness, his willingness 'to forgive all,' as he says, but what is that to me? I do not love him, I cannot live with him; and he himself will in time have enough of life under such conditions."

"And still, my dear child, it would be better than a scandal. You must do all you can to avoid it. You must spare his name."

"Ah," Nathalie Volynskaia wrung her hands in vexation,

"How can you hide it? What has happened cannot be undone. *Et puis cette position! . . .*" Nathalie lowered her eyes expressively. "I have been married eight years, and no children. . . . Paul knew perfectly well that Gourakin was in love with me, that there was never a ball or gathering at the Duchess's but that we met. But what is the use of speaking of it! . . . Let everyone think me mad, or anything they like—I love him and I will be his wife. I will do anything, I will bear anything."

"Nathalie, to lose your position, to join your life with such a young lightheaded boy! . . . Think only! He is spoilt, he is run after for his beauty, his lively nature and brilliant capacities, but to be his wife—oh, that is quite another thing! Believe me, such brilliant men are dangerous husbands. We will persuade him to go abroad for a year; many things may happen during a lifetime. . . . *Le principal, c'est de savoir sauver les apparences.* Besides, *chère enfant*, I know his father—an inflexible old man, like his grandmother Mme. Gourakina. *Vous aurez du fil à retordre*, believe me."

"I am ready to bear all, dear Baroness, even prepared that you will perhaps soon not want to know me, but so long as this is not so"—Nathalie smiled her fascinating smile—"I ask you, help us, be our guardian angel, and then I am sure the world's sympathies will be on our side. Someone must ask the Duchess as soon as possible to intercede on our behalf. I know, *chère baronne*, that no one will do that so nicely and tactfully as you. I beg of you, my dear, my good friend, speak for us, arrange it. I am afraid she will side with my husband; she likes him so much."

"She is very fond of you, *chère amie*, also. If she will want to take your part, she will know how to persuade anyone that you are right; *c'est une charmeuse.*"

Both ladies talked for a long time, and the more caressing Nathalie became, the warmer she pressed the Baroness's dry hand, the more she disclosed to her the details of her love for Michail Gourakin, the weaker became the protests and reasonings of the Baroness. Very experienced and far-seeing in matters relating to worldly intrigues, she was

weighing now in her mind all the reasons for and against the divorce which was so passionately desired by the enamoured Nathalie. It was necessary to have the Duchess on the side of the lovers, and after that the general opinion, always following the force of attraction exercised by the sumptuous palaces on the quay, would take their part also.

"Go to him, do, *chère baronne;* speak to him, ask, persuade him. He always obeys you," said Nathalie, pressing both hands of the Baroness and gazing at her with imploring eyes, while she jerked her head towards her husband's apartments at the word "he." "Ah, *chère baronne,* what a life we lead now, silent, avoiding each other, going out separately! . . . Oh, Lord, when will all this end?"

Nathalie pressed a fine lace handkerchief to her eyes, and, not able to contain herself any longer, burst into inaudible weeping.

At the other end of the flat were the official reception-rooms of Volynsky, who occupied a high post; and in a spacious study, before a large writing-table, covered with business papers, sat Nathalie's husband, rapidly glancing through and signing the papers handed to him before passing them over to an official standing before him in a respectful attitude.

"That is all, really all. . . . Take this yourself to the Deputy Minister and show him in what I differ from his opinion."

The functionary was just going to begin another report, when Volynsky stopped him with a tired frown.

"Enough for to-day, I am tired. I have other affairs. You will bring me your report to-morrow morning. Au revoir."

Volynsky, slightly rising, extended his hand, and when the functionary, softly stepping on the carpet, disappeared behind the noiselessly closing door, he leant back in his armchair, passed his hand with a tired gesture across his forehead, and as if caught unawares by a stream of thoughts remained a long time in an attitude of deep meditation. The first impression made by him was one of high bred

and culture, which seemed to be exhaled by his lean, very tall figure, with the thin and sharp profile, and shaved chin with the profound dimple in the middle.

A dark man with hair slightly turning grey, *svelte* and refined in his movements, speaking excellently well in several languages, and French with the accent of a born Parisian, exquisitely polite—he was the very type of a courtier. He knew how to mask his inner life so skilfully that no one could form an idea as to whether he had a kind or bad heart, nor of his ambition or self-love. All his actions were always a model of tact and good breeding.

"May I come in?" a woman's soft voice was heard asking, and without waiting for an answer the handle of the door moved, and Baroness Kern walked in with a languid gait. Volynsky rose to meet her, touched her hand with his lips, moved forward an armchair for her in silence, and sat down himself. His friendly relations with the Baroness were of long date, from their childhood. Although he himself never spoke first of his affairs, he always allowed her to talk freely on whatever subject she liked, and never declined to answer any direct question if the matter concerned himself personally.

"You are not looking well, Pavlik," said the Baroness, gazing at him through a lorgnon on a short golden handle, which just reached her nose.

"Tired . . ." drawled Volynsky in a monotonous voice.

"I have come to you from Nathalie."

"What is it?" asked Volynsky in the monotonous voice.

"She has taken the bit between her teeth. . . ."

Volynsky half closed his eyes, shrugged his shoulders, and significantly touched his forehead with his middle finger, on which there was a superb ring with an engraved seal.

"*Psychose!*" said Volynsky, raising his eyebrows and eyeing his carefully tended nails, as if speaking of something of no interest.

"Just so, a case of *psychose.* I do not recognize her at all! To fall in love to such a degree with a boy, and at her age—it's ridiculous! . . . However, Pavlik, something

must be done, and quickly too. . . . She is capable of anything in her state of mind."

"That is to say, what must be done?"

"A divorce. . . . Divorce her, Pavlik."

"It seems to me it would be better to speak of that after the birth of the child."

"But . . ." the Baroness gazed at Volynsky through her lorgnon in perplexed interrogation.

"Yes, yes, it is so. . . . I understand, *chère* Olga, your idea; but Nathalie is telling a lie, and doing so exclusively for Gourakin's benefit. He is much too inexperienced, and will believe anything she likes. I tell you, *chère* Olga, that this child after so many years of marriage—is mine. I know when their first meeting took place, and Nathalie knows it as well as I do."

"And you have kept silence all this time, Pavlik?"

"And to whom would you have me cry out about it?" Volynsky's eyes assumed a cold and contemptuous expression. "If I were as hasty and unrestrained as that boy Gourakin, I would probably have horsewhipped her on the same day. . . ."

Such a cruel look flashed in Volynsky's eyes that Baroness Kern understood that he had not done so only because he had felt an unutterable contempt both for his wife and her lover, but not for lack of courage.

"I told her at the time," continued Volynsky, the fire dying out of his eyes and his face resuming its usual cold and calm expression, "that until the birth of her child I will not discuss anything with her."

Baroness Kern was listening to Volynsky with special attention at present. Nathalie evidently, while initiating her into her love-story, had hidden the most essential point, and thus confirmed that she was ready to do anything to obtain a divorce and be able to marry the spoilt darling, the dashing young Michail Gourakin.

"Nathalie has completely lost her wits," continued Volynsky, looking at the Baroness with calm eyes and playing with a large ivory paper-cutter. "Gourakin is violent and unrestrained; I assure you he will beat her."

"Oh, Pavlik, what are you saying? He is well brough up, although there is certainly something of the untame nature in him."

"I maintain what I have said."

"How unpleasant and how unnecessary all this is!" sai the Baroness with sort of disgust, as she rose from he chair.

"It is dull and stupid. . . ."

Volynsky rose also with the Baroness, and, conductin her through the long *salon* and drawing-rooms, spoke i his usual calm tone of voice of the social gathering that wa to take place that evening at the French Ambassador' where he had to show himself for certain reasons.

On the next day Volynsky was just preparing to pas into his study after an almost silent luncheon with his wif during which he had exchanged with her short, insign ficant phrases in the presence of the servants, when a val handed him a narrow envelope on a silver tray. Volynsk silently read the few lines, written in French in a delicat feminine handwriting, and, ordering the carriage to b brought round, passed into his dressing-room instead o his study to change his velvet suit for an official costum After carefully brushing his whiskers and passing the nai brush over his irreproachable nails, Volynsky drew on pair of pale yellow gloves and, impressively solemn in h cold beauty, entered the carriage and told the coachma to drive to one of the magnificent palaces. Silent servant with shoulder knots and gaiters conducted him with r spectful bows through a long suite of reception-rooms t the last one. Almost simultaneously from the opposit side a tall, splendidly built woman entered with an extra ordinarily animated face and dressed with Parisian elegance she extended her hand with a friendly smile to Volynsk and asked him to follow her.

"Come into a quiet corner, *cher monsieur*, and then w shall not be interrupted."

They entered a small drawing-room, in the style o Louis XV., with precious Aubusson rugs on the walls an a beautifully stuccoed ceiling. The Duchess, when sh

wanted, could be enchanting, and, knowing this, she used her powers of fascination whenever she deemed necessary. Her court was not only one of the most sumptuous, but the gayest as well, thanks to the irrepressible vivacity of the hostess and also of the host himself, a fine connoiseur and admirer of women and wine. Notwithstanding her foreign origin, the Duchess had assimilated herself very easily, and acquired the special manner which made friendship with her possible and easy of attainment. She was surrounded by a crowd of sincere admirers; many envied her, and therefore maligned and accused her in whispers of lightly treating the dignity of her position. At the grand receptions at Court, with her stately bearing and figure of a classic goddess, she assumed a severe and inaccessible expression, which, however, never misled her friends, and the same evening, her beautiful shoulders bare, she used to be laughing merrily and lightheartedly, surrounded by an admiring and devoted crowd, dancing indefatigably, drinking champagne, and giving herself up to the joy of living with the careless lightheartedness of a spoilt beauty. It used to be said of her, "*Elle n'est pas belle, mais elle est pire.*"

Volynsky did not know that an hour before his arrival Baroness Kern had been sitting in the same room, begging the Duchess to arrange the affair of the divorce, to avoid a possible catastrophe in Volynsky's family, as, she assured, Nathalie had lost her head completely, and would be capable of suicide. The Duchess had promised full support for two reasons: firstly, she herself had helped to bring about the love affair between Nathalie and Gourakin, supporting his courtship and teasing Nathalie about it; and secondly, she was a great admirer of Volynsky, and now decided that this would be a most favourable moment to win him for herself, after persuading him to give his wife her freedom, and she resolved to bring into play all her feline grace and irresistible fascination. Like all the others, she could not understand Volynsky, and this circumstance only attracted and urged her on the more.

More than an hour Volynsky remained with the Duchess.

When he came out, and with deep respect, in the most perfect courtier-like manner he bent down over the hand extended to him, the eyes of the Duchess glittered with a glad, provoking fire, like those of a bird of prey in expectation of its victim. Volynsky's face was as before, of a clear pallor, his eyes half closed, either from exhaustion or agitation. For one scarcely perceptible moment he retained in his own the hot little hand extended to him to kiss.

IV

Some time passed, and all the near friends of Gourakin were concerned by the news, which ha in "society," that Volynsky had acceded to h prayers and consented to a divorce, and that authority had ordered his marriage to be imm dissolved. The young Guardsman obtained perm marry, but under the condition that he was to regiment and go away from Petersburg for a whil same time as this news was being spread, Mich tions were very much grieved by his extraordinary He took to revelling and drinking, and for mor fortnight no one could obtain an interview with h

Old Mme. Gourakina kept a persistent silence, her raised eyebrows and the nervous *tic* in the c her mouth betrayed her secret agitation. Marie s notes daily to her nephew at his regiment, urgin come to them, to talk over important matters, received no answer, and hiding her tears, and not speak to her mother about Michail's fate, which w troubling them both, she also kept silence and vainly each succeeding day. She did not know proud and authoritative mother suffered no less Mme. Gourakina had given to her only grandso force of love that her nature was capable of, alth remained true to herself and never allowed it to ap wardly. No one knew that on retiring late at nig bedroom and lighting with her own hands the lit before the ikon-case with the old family ikons, herself of her Chantilly cap, and putting on a dark dressing-gown (old Gourakina looking quite sma soft felt slippers without heels) and casting aside h proud inaccessibility, she used to bend her knee

embroidered cushion—the work of Marie—and remain thus a long time whispering prayers, making the sign of the cross, and calling to the Mother of God to protect her grandson. Tears, the inconsolable tears of old age, would run down the wrinkles of the sorrowing face, which in those moments seemed so kind, so simple, so unlike the one with which she appeared next morning at nine o'clock precisely in the dining-room, where Marie had to await her coming by the side of the steaming coffee-pot.

Mme. Gourakina had a particularly strong and hardy constitution. In the old days she used to accompany her husband in the sleigh on his long voyages of revision among the deep snows of Siberia, and not only did not claim any care or help, but it was she who always undertook the ordering, most energetically and independently, of the unpacking of the travelling hampers, the arrangements for the night halts, and the changing of the horses. Her authoritative manner never admitted of any delay or demur; everyone seemed to understand this at once, and most of all her own husband, who prized most highly and greatly respected his "Lady Commander." Having attained, thanks to her unfailing energy, the highest degree in the Civil Service, the old man suddenly fell ill, and after a short malady died while reclining on a Turkish sofa. From that very day Mme. Gourakina had the old broad bed carried out of her bedroom, and she slept on the Turkish sofa. Her force of will and energy were inherited by her son, Michail's father; her daughters resembled their father. The eldest one married quickly and well, but the youngest one, Marie, she kept with her, with the egoism of old age, not wanting to deprive herself of a meek and utterly faithful attendant. Marie always accompanied her mother everywhere, carefully wrapped her up in rugs in the carriage, wrote her letters under dictation, read to her during the long winter evenings, did all her shopping, and, refusing all invitations, gave herself up utterly to her mother, as in the olden days she had given up her pleasures for the sake of her little nephew. Mme. Gourakina bore herself towards her daughter with the kindly but strictly

reserved attitude with which a good regimental commander treats his subordinates. She still continued to see in Marie the meek, obedient little girl, not noticing that Marie knew much of life already, that she had learnt its disillusions and disappointments, and that the heart of the thirty-five-year-old maiden, who had inherited her mother's intelligence and penetration, was the heart of a woman who had penetrated into the depths of life's substance and meaning. Marie loved her mother and deeply respected her at first by inertia, but as the years rolled on she retained these feelings more consciously. Her mother's unbending will was always directed towards good objects and in the way of duty, both in respect to herself and others. She was never afraid to speak the truth, to stand up for anyone suffering a wrong; she never cringed before anyone or blamed anyone behind his back—if she blamed it was always openly, with the evident desire that her opinion would be transmitted to the person whom it concerned. Very severe in questions of morality, she herself led an irreproachable life. She neither visited nor would allow Marie to visit the houses where all was not quite right and above board on the part of the women. She was very farseeing, and there where others often did not notice anything, she either saw much that was good or bad. For some time she had discontinued her visits to the house of Prince Alexei Vassilievitch, and when in her presence people blamed him for his too open liaison with a ballet-dancer, she spoke of him with pity, calling him a weak but kind man. When people praised the virtuous and pious life of Princess Anna Valerianovna, old Gourakina kept silence or else changed the conversation.

On receiving a telegram from her son Vladimir that he was coming to Petersburg with the early morning train, she told Marie to go to the station to meet her brother and to see that his room was prepared for him. Marie understood by the tone of her mother's voice that her brother's arrival was expected and that evidently her mother had called him up to speak of his son. Vladimir was older than Marie by several years, and there was very little in com-

mon between them. In face and character he resembled his mother. After the Turkish campaign, in which he had been severely wounded and obliged to leave the service, he had retired to the country, giving up his life to books and the writing of memoirs. Although Marie feared the arrival of her nephew's strict father, on the other hand she hoped that the latter would be able to put an end to Michail's disorderly life, and perhaps bring about a favourable result in the question of his son's marriage, which the whole family disliked so much.

The train arrived in the early morning; the lamps were still burning on the station platform. The wintry air was full of the smoke of the engines, and one had the uncomfortable and sleepy feeling known to all those who rise at an unusually early hour to meet a morning train. Vladimir kissed his sister, and, not seeing anyone else, asked for his son.

"Mamma did not let him know of your arrival; the telegram came very late."

He asked no more of his son. On the way home he spoke to his sister of life in the country, of the severe frosts, and complained of his health, although he looked quite well. Mme. Gourakina entered the dining-room at nine o'clock as usual, and her son, having changed after his journey, joined her there. At table the conversation ran on from one subject to another, but the principal theme for which he had been sent for seemed to be avoided by mutual consent. Marie understood that in her presence her mother and brother would not consider it right to discuss such a scandalous story, of which, however, poor Marie had heard from her nephew in details that her mother did not even suspect. On leaving the table Vladimir followed his mother to her apartments, and there they had a long talk. Like herself, the more angry or agitated he became, the more silent he was; in serious questions he was spare of his words, and never departed from a decision once taken.

In a couple of hours he left his mother's room with the corners of his mouth drawn down still more, changed his

dress, and drove off to Prince Alexei Vassilievitch, whom he did not find at home. Princess Anna Valerianovna was in and he went to her rooms. As usual she wore a tailor costume with a high starched collar which made her face look still more like a man's.

"How are you, *cher* Vladimir? Since when have you arrived? I have been expecting you. Sit down, and let's have a talk. Is mamma well? Troubled, I suppose? . . . What has happened to 'him'? Such a change in 'him'! . . ." began the Princess, lowering her voice and shaking her head with an expression of rebuke and sympathy. "I hardly ever see 'him,' and my influence, dear Vladimir, is totally paralyzed by his surroundings."

Gourakin listened attentively to the Princess's words and continued to be silent.

"You know my ideas and way of life," said the Princess as if in a hurry to give vent to an irritation which she was feeling against someone. "I am occupied with my affairs, with prayer, and do not go out into the world except on official occasions. So much has been gone through, and we are going through so much even now, and still, you see, there are people who can amuse themselves, and think of dresses and pleasure. Your Michail got caught in the whirlwind, and it has borne him along. How often have I warned him and told my husband! . . . However," the Princess sighed hopelessly, "my words do not count for much with Prince Alexei Vassilievitch. I am accustomed to this, and little by little I am retiring from the world. I do not complain; let God's will be done. But what moral support can Michail obtain from Prince Alexei when he himself . . . as everyone knows . . . is an eyesore for everyone?"

Although her husband's infidelity was now a thing of several years' standing, the Princess could not grow used to her position of abandoned wife, and was always glad of an occasion to complain of her fate and persuade others and herself that she did not mind it any more.

"Your mother is right; the Duchess has quite concurred in the misfortune which has overtaken Michail."

"Your expression is much too soft, Princess: it is not a misfortune, it is immorality."

"Certainly, it is immoral; but I am speaking of the marriage that they are trying to arrange. I wonder at Volynsky. In his place, I would never consent to a divorce; I would have her sent to a convent, would have her shriven. But this seems a sort of connivance. And believe me, Voldemar, Michail is drinking because he understands that he has got his neck into a noose. He has created for himself an impossible position."

At this moment Prince Alexei Vassilievitch entered the drawing-room. At the sight of his friend and quondam chief on the battlefield a friendly smile illumined for one moment the stern face of Gourakin.

"Yes, our Michail has got himself into a mess," said the Prince, seating himself and extending his long legs on the carpet. "Nothing can be done now; he will have to marry. . . ."

From the tone of the Prince's voice it was impossible to judge whether he blamed or justified his young kinsman in the whole story. The good-natured and slightly mocking tone which he always used in his wife's presence in all cases which he called "*histoire de femme*" irritated the Princess, who felt that he did not want to blame in others the faults of which he was guilty himself.

"What is to be done, however?" asked the Princess, throwing her husband an unfriendly glance.

"Await events." The Prince shrugged his shoulders.

She seemed to want to raise an objection, but restrained herself.

The Prince rose. In his tall stately figure there was an expression of vigour and pride, notwithstanding the good-natured look of his eyes and smile.

"Come to my rooms," said he to Gourakin.

"I would like to see my son."

"He must be sent for. He has been living fast, the naughty fellow, for more than a week. From noon they are playing cards and drinking at that madcap Davidoff's."

"Give me his address. I will give my orders."

While passing the long suite of rooms the Prince related to his friend with evident concern all the details of the scandalous story. As soon as they entered the study he passed on into his bedroom and came out holding carefully between the palms of his hands something which he was pressing to his lips, and said to Gourakin:

"Just look only, what a darling, what a beauty!"

The Prince moved his palms asunder; the small head of a tiny, trembling, shaggy puppy peeped out. It was strange to see the enormously tall figure of the Prince, with his manly features, which were at the moment wearing an expression of almost childlike tenderness towards the tiny creature held so safely between the strong muscular hands.

"So you are still fond of your pups?" said Gourakin with a smile and an indifferent glance at the Prince's hands. "I would have thought the war would have hardened you. . . . And there was reason therefor. . . ."

"On the contrary, my friend. After all the horrors and groans and curses of death I have learnt to value more highly love. . . ."

"For puppies?" Gourakin laughed, his face becoming at once softer and kinder.

"For puppies also," said the Prince with a smile and an emphasis on the word "also."

"That means, all is as it used to be?" asked Gourakin, drawing in the smoke of his cigarette and looking around him at the well-known portraits on the wall.

"*Que veux-tu, mon vieux! Dans la vie il n'y a que la femme.* She will get you into her toils, charm and fascinate you, and do what you like, struggle as much as you can, there is no escape. And at our age it is worse still, if you are caught: loss of self-respect, jealousy, you have to suffer all." The Prince's face wore a look of hidden pain. "Yes, yes," he continued, after having returned from bearing away his doggie, and laying his hand on his friend's shoulder, "there is no such thing as complete happiness and peace; we suffer ourselves and make others suffer too."

"I do not agree with you. If you must suffer yourself, then do so, but we have no right to torture others."

The Prince frowned painfully.

"Listen, Voldemar; there are some sides of human weaknesses that are absolutely inaccessible to you; you are built out of a single and strong block."

"But I do not blame—you must know me. . . ."

"I know that you do not blame, but you do not under stand either; admit that you do not understand."

"I do not understand." Gourakin smiled again, and the smile softened the meaning of his words.

They were evidently speaking of something that had been a subject of discussion between them before and which they both understood.

"Now, in respect to your Michail: I pity him very much in all this stupidly managed business. I do not approve of Volynskaia, but I cannot blame him."

"Well, I do blame him, and very severely too. He has entered into man's estate and already he has marred his reputation by impure relations with a woman. And then his whole behaviour—this unceasing drinking. . . . I tell you frankly, I am deeply grieved. He is my only one."

The conversation ran on on the same subject. Gourakin blamed his son very harshly; the Prince tried in vain to soften the irate and grieved father. After remaining with his friend for some time Gourakin departed, outwardly calm, but inwardly deeply concerned by what he had heard of his son in that house.

V

It was just four p.m., but the revelling and drinking which had been going on at the bachelor quarters of Davidoff, almost without stopping since the preceding day, were at their height. After a lunch with *bliny* and plenty of wine some of the guests passed into the study of the host, and there surrounded a card-table, where a tall staid Guardsman, his face pale from wine and exhaustion, with red whiskers and rapacious mouth, was keeping a bank. It seemed that it did not concern him personally what his white and carefully tended hands were throwing out right and left. His face kept its expression of steady self-possession.

"Gentlemen, not so loud, we can't play so," he reminded from time to time his comrades, who crowded round him, laughing, arguing, and pushing. And again his hands threw out the cards as if mechanically. Near him lay a heap of bank notes.

"Again lost! The devil! H'm, h'm! . . ." hummed and sniffed a small, dark, lively officer, with unbuttoned uniform, bright black eyes, and a face excited by wine and play, fidgeting on his chair.

"Mishka, lay your stake on the Jack, I tell you. You will be sure to win. . . ." Quite a young officer with a face like a boy and a suspicion of down on his upper lip kept plying Mishka Kovalevsky with his advice.

"Shut up, old devil! How you do bother! Take him away, or else, by God, I'll thrash him!" The good-natured and merry Kovalevsky suddenly lost his temper.

A burst of laughter was the answer. And really, the small figure of Mishka Kovalevsky, with ruffled hair, and wide open angry eyes, was most comical. Even the banker lost his look of Olympian calm for one moment and smiled,

though his eyes still retained their cold and calm expression; the smile touched only on the greedy, rapacious mouth.

"Gentlemen, it is impossible to play so," he repeated, calling them to order.

"Well, now, help me out, old witch!" cried Mishka Kovalevsky, thumping with his fist the queen of hearts, so that the candles shook on the table.

"Kovalevsky, you will break the table," said the banker without stopping in his dealing of the cards.

Mishka was a desperate gambler, and either won furiously or else lost all that he had. At present he was in a losing vein, and his comrades were excitedly following the course of the game.

"Lost! . . . Lost! . . . again lost!" was heard on all sides.

"Hand over the stake," said the banker to Mishka.

"Hand over! . . . Certainly I'll hand over the money; you need not remind me. . . . *Sale bobine!*"

"What did you say, Kovalevsky?" asked the banker, gazing significantly into Mishka's eyes.

"Nothing at all. . . . Don't tease. . . You see that I am in a rage."

"Mishka, Mishenka, my friend, leave the cards. . . . Come here. . . ." Baron Inks called to him in a half drunken voice, lying near on a sofa, in shirt and trousers, with a cigar in his mouth. "Have you heard Demidoff's last *bon mot* about Mme. Bezpaloff? Gentlemen, have you heard? . . ." Inks went on, although no one was listening to him. "*Elle est chère, et elle a beaucoup de chair.* Well said! And they say her husband was present. Cleverly said! . . . I saw Nellie and Fifiche to-day, and told them to be here for sure," continued the Baron with heavy tongue.

At this moment a burst of laughter was heard in a neighbouring room, together with the fall of a heavy body and of broken crockery. A young officer ran up to the card-table. He had a pink and white face, blue eyes, a lively manner, and ever-moving legs.

It was the host—the jolly madcap Davidoff, always without a care in the world and a kind-hearted comrade.

"Mishka, come quicker. We are laying a wager on you. Stop playing—you have lost for sure," said Davidoff, pulling Kovalevsky's sleeve and continuing to laugh at what must have taken place in the dining-room.

"I'll come directly. A last stake and to the devil with them all! . . ."

Davidoff placed himself near Kovalevsky, both hands in the pockets of his trousers, swinging his legs and biting his lips.

"Queen! . . . Queen! Bravo, Mishka! And now *basta*. Come to us. We have laid a wager with Evers for a dozen of champagne. . . . Come, brother, don't forsake me. . . ."

"Well, tell me plainly, what is the matter?" asked Kovalevsky, pocketing the banknotes that he had won and trying not to look pleased at his good fortune.

"Say, my friend, you are too drunk!"

"Fool! Am I ever drunk? . . . But what must I do?"

They passed the hall, in which lay in a heap cloaks, empty bottles and unopened chests of wine, and entered a long narrow room, in the middle of which stood a table with the remains of the feast, and a whole array of glasses, wine-glasses and bottles. Several officers, with flushed or pale faces, mostly without their uniforms, in shirt sleeves, were trying, with loud laughter and jokes, to lift from the floor a totally drunk Frenchman in evening dress.

"Attention, attention . . . messieurs. . . . *Mon gilet, ma cravate*," muttered he with thick unsteady tongue, and notwithstanding the united efforts to get him up, he resisted and again fell on his side. Near him lay an upturned table with three legs and broken bits of some plates and glass.

"Leave him alone, boys, to the devil. . . . Let him lie there," ordered Davidoff, and all turned towards him. "Here is Mishka—I wager that he will jump over. . . . Mishka, you will clear this table with all that is on it with a run of three paces?" he asked his comrade, merrily slapping him on the shoulder.

Kovalevsky instantly threw off his uniform.

"Take away that tipsy pig with his table . . ." he pointed with an authoritative gesture to the muttering Frenchman —"and now, out of my way. . . ."

The Frenchman was pulled aside, and Kovalevsky, small, strong, and extraordinarily muscular, retreating, stopped at three paces opposite the laid dinner-table. . . .

"Bravo, Mishka, go on!" yelled Davidoff in a perfect ecstasy, jerking and shifting his legs like a cavalry horse.

"Madcap! He will break all your china," laughed his comrades, in expectation of an unusual sight. All eyes were concentrated on the general favourite and splendid gymnast. Kovalevsky made a scarcely perceptible elastic and agile movement. In a moment he rose lightly from the floor, flew like a bird over the table without touching anything, even with his spur, and alighted on the other side on the tips of his bent feet.

"Throw him up, throw him up! . . . Hurrah! . . . Throw up Mishka! . . ."

Davidoff shouted and rushed about more than anyone else. Kovalevsky fought, struggled, swearing and puffing, but he was lifted and thrown up into the air several times, feeling very uncomfortable in his position of hero of the general enthusiasm.

Keeping his eyes tightly closed, with set teeth, he thanked his admirers with a volley of the choicest oaths.

"Where is Gourakin? Gourakin, show your trick. . . . Where is he?" was heard on all sides, when the throwing-up was ended.

Gourakin was not to be found. It appeared that he had gone to sleep in the host's bedroom.

He was dragged out by force. After his sleep and coming out of a dark room, he stood in the middle of the room, his eyes blinking at the light, yawning and endeavouring to smooth his ruffled hair, his shirt unbuttoned at the throat.

"Too bad! . . . Why did you wake me? . . ." he repeated in a discontented voice.

"Your trick . . . show us your trick. . . . Plenty of

time to sleep. . . . Refresh yourself, brother. There, have a drink."

Davidoff poured him out some wine, but Michail, still blinking at the light, and in a bad temper, roughly pushed away the glass extended to him and spilt the wine on himself and on Davidoff.

"Heigho, boys, he is beginning to be turbulent!" cried Davidoff. No one was speaking sensibly now: all were screaming and shouting so that by moments the voices were merged in one drunken hubbub.

"Michail Gourakin, show your trick and you may go to sleep. . . . Come, be obliging. . . . Many have not seen it."

"I am to show my trick? Very well, I will show you, but another one this time."

Slightly staggering, Gourakin clasped his hands at the back of his head, yawned deeply, stretched himself, shifted his shoulders as if casting off sleep, and smiling and showing two rows of even white teeth, became quite animated.

"Only this trick is a very difficult one, comrades. Come, Mishka, let's have some champagne!" said he to Kovalevsky, who was sitting astride a chair with his back to the table.

"Drink yourself, I do not want any more."

"If you won't drink, I won't show my trick." Gourakin seemed inclined to be obstinate.

"Mishka, drink . . . come now, drink. . . . To our regiment! . . . Hurra-ah! . . . To the women! To Bezoukhova . . . do you hear, Mishka?—to Bezoukhova! . . . To Volynskaia! . . . Gourakin. . . ."

"To Volynskaia! . . . Drink out of the bottle. . . ."

Michail Gourakin, with legs wide apart and head thrown back, was drinking slowly out of the bottle. The wine was gurgling in the neck of the bottle, and as Michail slightly swayed it spilt behind the unbuttoned shirt collar on to his strong muscular chest. Notwithstanding that he had been drinking for several days and had had very little sleep, Gourakin was still very handsome. An expression of devil-may-care audacity seemed to add to the beauty of his features.

"Now, look on!" said Gourakin, replacing the empty bottle on the table. "Stand aside, gentlemen, and do not disturb me, or else . . . or else what, Mishka?"

"Devil knows what!" replied Kovalevsky in an absolutely sober voice.

"Well, here goes. . . . . I am beginning!"

As if afraid of touching anything, Gourakin cautiously bent down on one knee at the narrow side of the table, imperceptibly getting his shoulder under the edge and leaning on it.

"Count!" he cried.

"One . . . two . . . three. . . ."

Suddenly something quite unexpected occurred: Gourakin, leaning with all his force under the edge of the heavy oaken table, rapidly rose up; with a clatter and crash all the china, bottles and glasses flew to the ground. Gourakin freed his shoulder, and the table, crashing down on its two heavy legs, again stood in its place. A regular hubbub arose. Some blamed Gourakin, some laughed immoderately, and the young scamp himself, in a wild and drunken frenzy, stamped about on the broken bits of china, glass, and all that came in his way.

"Chevaliers garde, prenez garde,
La garde à cheval vous regarde . . ."

he yelled at the top of his voice all the time.

"Stop him, comrades! He is gone mad. . . . Put him to bed," cried Kovalevsky, outraged by the drunken turbulency of his friend.

Davidoff, both hands in his pockets, swinging his body back and forward, was laughing immoderately over Gourakin's trick. While the orderlies were picking up the broken bits from the floor and setting the table to rights, no one heard the front-door bell ring several times amid the general laughter and shouting. One of the officers who had been playing cards opened the door and, standing on the threshold of the dining-room, made a trumpet of his hands and called out:

"A letter for Gourakin! . . . A servant is waiting. . . ."

"What letter? . . . Let him bring it in . . ." answered Michail.

In the doorway stood the servant of old Mme. Gourakina with his long grey whiskers and clean-shaven chin.

"Davidoff, take the letter from him. . . . Again Aunt Marie, probably. . . ."

Michail approached, staggering, opened the letter, but could not read it, and passed it on to Davidoff.

"Read it; I do not understand anything."

"Phe-w-w-w-w!" whistled Davidoff, "a bad business, *cher* Michail. Your father writes that you are to meet him to-night on important business. Ha-ha-ha! . . . Important business—that's bad, brother. What must we say?"

"Tell him, Dementiy, that I will come. I will have a good sleep first and then come. I am only telling you, mind, that I shall sleep; you need tell the General simply that I'm coming. You say that he arrived this morning? Well, I am very glad. Here—take this. Drink to the General's health. . . . And, brother, do not say anything there. . . . Well, well, I know you—you won't betray me. And in honour of this sad occasion, messieurs et mesdames, I am going to sleep. Tell them to wake me at nine o'clock. A general battle is looming ahead. Ex-x-cellent! *Vive Henri Quatre, vive ce roi des rois!*" sang Michail in a mellow though unsteady baritone, disappearing behind the door leading into Davidoff's bedroom.

"Brukhavetz, did you hear the order?" called Davidoff to the orderly, opening the door into the pantry near the dining-room.

"Right, y' honour, I heard: I must wake his honour at nine o'clock."

"Well, do not forget; look after the clock."

"Right, y' honour. . . ."

Brukhavetz, the dexterous and capable orderly, together with his assistant Michaltchuk, shared the merry humour of their superiors. All that was not drunk in the dining-room was immediately swallowed up in the pantry and kitchen with the assistance of the cook, a silent man, but steady in his cups.

"So-so, what a lot of crockery broken!" giggled the simple-minded and merry Michaltchuk. "My word, a fine fellow! What a push he gave the table! . . . Splendid fellow! I love such ones. . . ."

"Come, don't chatter; wash up what is yet unbroken. . . . Certainly he is a fine fellow. He is a Guardsman for that . . ." remarked Brukhavetz impressively, upsetting a half filled wine-glass into his mouth and wiping his blackened thick and hard moustache with the back of his hand. "And how he sings! Have you heard him? The other day he sang here; when he began a tsigane song, sparks seemed to fly out of one's eyes."

"He was singing just now. . . . I do not know in what language—it sounded like English."

"No, that was not English"—Brukhavetz shook his head, breathed into a glass, held it up against the light and proceeded to wipe it dry. "I know that song: 'Vive Anry katter, vive se-ra de-rou! The Devil took a cutter and sailed down the Dnieper too.'"

Michaltchuk broke into a sonorous laugh, and, slapping his knees with his palms, even squatted down in ecstasy.

"Brukhavetz, open another box of wine," the master's voice was heard.

Both orderlies rushed towards the door behind which the drunken merriment of the young officers seemed to increase and never to have an end.

VI

A LITTLE past nine Michail, after a good sleep, with a vivid consciousness of the forthcoming unpleasant explanation, was entering his grandmother's red drawing-room, which he remembered so well since his childhood. As usual near the round table, lit by the tall lamp, sat the old lady with the unalterable knitting. Her son, Vladimir Gourakin, sat near her on the sofa, with a tired expression on his face; he was carrying on a desultory conversation with his mother. Marie remained in her room. Knowing the inflexible nature of her brother, she was in fear for her nephew, and having locked her door, she was walking up and down the room, at one time taking up her embroidery, then laying it aside again after a few stitches; then, approaching the ikon-case with the holy ikons, she whispered a prayer, crossed herself, sighed, and again resumed her walk.

Hearing the sound of approaching spurs, Vladimir Gourakin broke off the conversation.

"There he is," he said, glancing towards the door fixedly.

Michail had quite a fresh and healthy look, notwithstanding the disorderly life that he had been leading during many days. His sound, strong constitution could bear any amount of excesses without bad results.

"I had not hoped to see you to-day," said the elder Gourakin, rising to greet his son.

His face was unsmiling, and the eyes were very stern.

"Why? Am I late? It is just half-past nine." Michail looked at his watch. "As you see, I am in time, and had I known that you were coming to-day, I would have been at the station to meet you."

The old lady raised her eyes to glance at her grandson, and wondered at his calm tone and fresh look.

"*Pauvre garçon!* . . ." she said to herself, resuming her knitting.

Vladimir Gourakin at once proceeded to the disagreeable subject.

"I have come up from the country to have a serious talk with you, Michail. Although you have become addicted to drunkenness in such an unseemly manner, I hope your brains are still in a state to reason logically."

"To be on a spree occasionally does not necessarily mean to be a drunkard," Michail said with a smile.

"I do not see any difference," his father interrupted him severely.

He began to speak in sharp, concise phrases. He spoke long, and anyone listening to him could see clearly that he would not desist from any single word under any circumstances.

Michail listened to him without interrupting. From time to time he extended his hand and caught the soft ball of blue wool when it nearly fell off the edge of the table to the ground.

Once or twice he wanted to protest against his father's words, but changed his mind at once and continued to be silent, glancing now and then at his grandmother, who sat opposite to him and did not lift her eyes from her work. Her face, like that of her son, looked very stern; but Michail could see that she was greatly agitated; the right corner of her mouth, with the scarcely perceptible grey down over the upper lip, was moving with a nervous *tic*. A dark and heavy shadow seemed to creep over Michail's heart. The metallic ring of his father's voice began to irritate him much more than the sense of his words.

"I am well aware," he was saying, "that Mme. Volynskaia has no personal fortune until the death of her uncle; if you disobey me and marry her, I will not add a single copeck to the allowance which you receive now, because I shall not recognize the marriage, and for me you remain unmarried. To throw up your regiment, break up all your life at twenty-one years of age, and marry a divorced woman, older than you, is madness. I never expected such

a lack of good sense in you," he concluded his long speech.

Michail continued to be silent. Gourakina looked at him with astonishment.

"Why are you silent? Share your thoughts with us."

"What is there for me to say, *grand'maman?* Besides good sense, of which father speaks, there are such positions in questions of honour when no hesitation is possible. . . ."

"Come, my boy," interrupted his father, "if you want to speak of questions of honour, then let me tell you that your action, which has called forth the necessity of marrying, can only be called a dishonourable action."

"If I had had your grey head on my shoulders and your experience, father, then certainly all this would not have happened."

"You are talking nonsense, because at your age it was not my experience that restrained me from base actions, but the feeling of duty, which my mother had instilled in me in the same way as she tried to instil it in you, when you were with her. In a word, you know my decision in case of your marriage, and now you are free to do as you like, and to break your neck, if you so desire."

"Listen to reason, Michail, we beg of you—listen to reason while there is yet time," said Mme. Gourakina very seriously.

"But, *grand'maman,* what do you wish me to do?—to go to Nat . . ." Michail stammered—"to Volynskaia and explain to her that as my father and grandmother do not want her, I also refuse to marry her? And that will be honourable, that will be generous?"

Michail had been restraining himself up to that moment, but suddenly he lost his temper; he turned red, his eyes flashed angry fires, the chair on which he had been sitting nearly fell down, pushed back by his impatient hand.

"Pray, do not shout, and try and keep your temper," his father stopped him. "You are again talking nonsense. No one is asking you to go to Volynskaia to explain matters; if you consent to hear reason, everything will be arranged in such a way that neither your honour nor our

name will suffer. Believe me, Volynskaia will only be the gainer. If you do not obtain permission to marry from the authorities, she can remain with her husband, who will be pleased to avoid all this unnecessary scandal, and will keep his wife, for which she will be grateful to him later on."

"I have given Volynskaia my word of honour, father, to obtain her divorce, whatever it may cost me."

"Many promises have been given as hastily and thoughtlessly, especially by such boys as you."

"I cannot go back on my promise."

"Is that your last word?"

"Yes, my last. . . ."

"Fool!"

Vladimir Gourakin, thoroughly angry, left the room hastily. When the sound of his footsteps had died away, old Gourakina slowly folded her work without looking up, put it in the silk bag, threw the cords over her arm, took her feet off the footstool, and with a rustle of her black silk dress rose from her armchair.

"The only son, the only grandson, and instead of joy, you are dealing us such an irreparable, cruel blow. . . ."

She looked at her grandson with a sorrowful and stern expression.

"Believe me, such a marriage cannot be happy. . . . How little you love us! . . . God be with you! . . ."

Her voice broke, and the corner of her mouth trembled still more. With noiseless slow steps she left the room.

Michail sank heavily into the armchair which the old lady had occupied, and covering his face with his hands, he leant his elbows on the table and remained for a long time without moving. His father's speech, full of threats and reproaches, had not moved him—he had listened to it with a dull and stubborn feeling—but the words spoken by his grandmother had penetrated into his heart and touched something that he had been trying to drown all the past week. Before the irrevocable event by which he was striking such a cruel blow to his family, his conviction in the strength of his love for Volynskaia began to waver, and

he understood now that he would be willing to give much to undo the past. . . .

After incessant drinking, after the excitement of the last days, his nerves were strained, and the return to real life now this painful explanation had taken place, seemed unutterably bitter to happy-go-lucky, spoilt Michail. Tears choked him.

"Misha! . . . Mishenka, what is the matter?"

A caressing hand was stroking his hair and lovingly trying to raise his head. He had not heard how his aunt had crept cautiously, so as not to be seen, into the drawing-room; he did not see the pity and sorrow shining in her eyes.

"Mishenka, share your sorrow with me, you will feel better. . . . What did your father say? Misha . . . you are crying! Oh, for God's sake, don't cry! My own poor boy! Would you like me to speak to my brother? I'll ask him . . ."

Marie put her arm round her nephew's shoulder. Tears filled her eyes; she was ready to go and beg her brother, mother, anyone, if only she could console her nephew, and see him again bright and happy.

"No, auntie, it is not necessary."

Michail took her hand without raising his head.

"There is nothing to ask of them. . . . I knew it all. . . . It is not because of that. . . ."

"Then what is it, Misha? Your heart is heavy, isn't it?"

Michail simply nodded in reply, and emitted a low sigh.

"Ah, Mishenka, I knew it, I felt it. . . . That is why you have been drinking. Listen to me: believe me, there is nothing irrevocable as yet. Do not marry—that must not be; everything and everyone is against your marriage. . . . Little by little all will be forgotten, and you will not regret it afterwards. . . . Mishenka, your father told mamma that it can be arranged quite simply; you will not obtain permission to marry—that is all."

"But the child! Understand—you, at least, auntie—that she will be the mother of my child. I must, must marry her. . . ."

"Mishenka, and what if the child is not yours? I heard something. . . . Baroness Kern knows something. . . ."

"What can she know? It is even strange to listen to this." Michail raised his tear-stained face. "Certainly she is ready to say any nonsense out of friendship to Volynsky."

"Mishenka, do not be hasty, and believe me that I in no wise wish to blame Nathalie Volynskaia, but she is so much in love with you, so obstinate in her desires, so unrestrained sometimes, that she may have purposely told you something that is not true."

"No, auntie, you know her too little; she loves me too much to deceive me. Whatever happens I must marry her, and as soon as possible; the child must bear my name, not Volynsky's."

Marie did not hear the last words of her nephew. Still continuing to stroke his hair, she stood absorbed in thought. Her tears had stopped. It seemed as if she were making up her mind to something.

"At least do not drink any more, Mishenka. Mamma is suffering very, very much. I am afraid she will be ill. You know how she can bear up, but I see how she is feeling."

"All right, auntie, do not worry; I will not drink any more. To-morrow I will be here, and now I must go to sleep; I am d——d tired after all these worries."

Michail hugged his aunt with great feeling, and she kissed him and made the sign of the cross over him several times.

VII

In one of the remote streets of the town a cab drove up to a tall stone house. Volynskaia descended, paid the cabman and entered the front door. The porter, accustomed to generous tips, bowed respectfully to the lady, whose face, always covered with a thick veil, he had never seen. Nathalie ascended to the first story, hastily opened a door with a latchkey, and gave a sigh of relief when it closed again behind her.

In the hall no coat was hanging. Nathalie threw off her fur pelisse and entered a small, daintily furnished room, where a tea-table was laid out with biscuits, fruit and wine. She looked at the watch at her waist; it was just four o'clock. Volynskaia divested herself of her fur cap, went up to the brightly burning fire, and stood thoughtfully gazing into the flames, at the same time listening attentively to the least noise on the staircase. Then she approached a writing-table and suddenly caught sight of an envelope with a well-known and beloved handwriting. For one second while she was opening it a shadow seemed to pass over her face, but after reading a few words a pleased smile broke out.

"I was here this morning. I may be late, but will be sure to come. Rest assured.—Yours, Michail."

Nathalie read these two lines several times, carefully folded the little note and put it in her purse. Reassured, she sank down into an armchair and again gave herself up to her thoughts. In her simple dark dress, with her extremely smooth black hair the colour of a raven's wing, and her bright dark eyes, she resembled very much a tsigane woman. Twice a week during the whole winter, on appointed days and hours, she and Michail Gourakin had

been in the habit of meeting in this small apartment which belonged to them. They had furnished it themselves, and every object seemed fraught with happy and loving memories. Often Volynskaia, acceding to Michail's prayers, would leave some grand ball earlier than usual, or the theatre, and come here, in her gorgeous evening dress, full of excitement at her own audacity. All was so well arranged that their little corner remained a secret from everybody. And nevertheless these hidden interviews, the agitation and fear of discovery, exhausted and irritated her. She wanted to be happy openly, not in a hidden way; she desired to be loved before the whole world, not to be separated for one single day from Michail, whom she loved with an unrestrainable, torturing, jealous love. She who had always liked a worldly life, honours, glitter, was now ready to sacrifice all only to become the wife of Michail, to have a right to his love and keep it for herself alone. She feared nothing; neither the society scandal, nor the loss of her brilliant position, nor Michail's youth. The more she was reasoned with, the more convincing were the objections raised before her, the stronger became her desire to overcome all obstacles and conquer her happiness.

A young girl of twenty, impetuous, self-willed, and hungry for love, she had married Volynsky. He was many years older than she, but he enjoyed such indisputable success in society that even for capricious Nathalie he seemed an unattainable idol. Out of a crowd of drawing-room beauties he had distinguished her by his attention, and the flattered self-love of the young girl soon turned into love for the brilliant courtier. But after her marriage Nathalie's love for her husband soon waned His perfectly calm, sarcastic attitude, and the disdainful indifference which he displayed in answer to her capriciousness and unrestrained fits of anger, were perfectly foreign to her passionate nature, and she withdrew her heart more and more from her cold self-possessed husband and plunged into the vortex of a worldly life. The longer they lived together, the more estranged they became. Volynsky, a widely edu-

cated man, deeply interested in all that was going on, always found time, even amid the whirl of social duties and pleasures, to keep in touch with the course of intellectual life, and he wondered at his wife's frivolity and blamed her complete indifference towards all that did not pertain to dress, balls, picnics, and social conquests. They had no children, and Volynsky left his wife completely free, quite assured that she would know how to use her freedom within the limits due to her position. All went smoothly. Nathalie had a crowd of admirers, and Volynsky continued to fascinate the ladies, and, enigmatic in his reserve and refined, correct bearing, was considered, as formerly, the most interesting and brilliant cavalier. Before strangers, instead of his usual sang-froid, he showed a respectful deference towards his wife, and no one could guess how completely indifferent he felt towards her. Volynsky was very well acquainted with the morals of society, and he soon perceived the dangerous game into which the frivolous and giddy ladies were drawing his wife and the dashing spoilt darling, young Gourakin. They found pleasure in whispering to the handsome boy that the wife of the proud statesman, so mocking to others and spoilt by adulation, was charmed by him; they urged him on, persuading him to be more daring, arranging their meetings and generally teasing him.

Volynsky had noticed the dangerous game during the last winter, and had slightly warned his wife, but as the lively-minded young Duchess had been the ringleader in the game, the husband's remark was met with a mocking and displeased smile.

Nathalie, very much interested in Gourakin, did not know that their frequent meetings were not sought by him, but were arranged by others. The youthful, pleasure-loving Guardsman did not care much about conquering women's hearts; he gave himself up to amusements, dancing, gay company, and drinking. The best dancer and conductor of cotillons at balls, an excellent performer of tsigane songs, a rather good poet, sometimes a successful composer of light romances and valses, he was a favourite in the best

social circles. Too much occupied with himself, he had not yet felt the desire for woman's love and caress, and notwithstanding his twenty years he had retained towards women the chivalrous feeling of a heart still untouched by the world's mire. The oftener Nathalie met him, the more she felt herself attracted towards him, the more her heart, which had become frozen under the cold indifference of her haughty husband, yearned for him. At one of the merry gatherings in the Duchess's palace, the company was playing at *petits jeux*.

"What must this forfeit do?" asked one of the merry conspirators of the oracle, who was represented by the Duchess. She sat in an armchair with a bandage over her eyes, and around her, laughing and joking, crowded the merry company, men, women and girls.

"Yes, yes; what shall this forfeit have to do?" was asked all around.

The forfeit, a glove, belonged to Gourakin, and all were very much interested to know what the oracle would order him to do. The young lady who held the glove touched the tip of the Duchess's slipper with her foot imperceptibly and pressed it with emphasis.

"*Proférez quelque chose de grave*," said she, looking at Gourakin mischievously.

The Duchess instantly guessed what it meant.

"The owner of the forfeit must confess Mme. Volynskaia, and for this purpose they must be conducted to the blue drawing-room and left there for fifteen minutes," the oracle announced in a serio-comic voice.

A burst of applause followed, and the pair was immediately carried off. Notwithstanding Nathalie's protests and objections, the doors were closed behind them, and after being told that they would not be let out before a quarter of an hour had passed, they were left alone. Nathalie was so confused at first that she did not know what to say. Gourakin, excited by wine and the dancing, was bolder and more ready-witted.

"I must confess you," said he with a laugh, and looking down at her, as she stood before him.

He was very tall, and beside him she seemed quite a child.

"I beg you, sinner, to confess your faults sincerely. Tell me your principal sin."

"I love . . ." began Nathalie mischievously and provokingly.

"That is no sin. . . . I love also," laughed Gourakin. "Whom or what do you love, sinner?"

"Guess, holy father. . . ."

"I am afraid to . . ." said Gourakin in a tragic whisper, and then laughed merrily.

"And whom do you love?" asked Nathalie, and became confused.

Gourakin understood her confusion and suddenly stopped jesting. She stood before him, so winning, so charming and provocative. For the first time in his life he felt himself passionately attracted towards a woman. He turned pale, and forgetting what they had been talking about he gazed at her with burning eyes. Both were silent. Nathalie's lips trembled nervously, her breath came in gasps.

"Whom do you love?" she repeated, hardly knowing what she was saying.

"I love you . . ." he answered in a whisper, and at the instant losing his head and self-possession, he made a step towards her, and catching her up in his arms like a child, he carried her to the sofa and covered with hot passionate kisses her face, neck, shoulders, arms. Gourakin was very strong, and Nathalie did not even attempt to resist him. . . .

Meanwhile in the drawing-room where the game was going on and the general merriment, heightened by champagne, was steadily increasing, they had forgotten all about the two absent ones, and a full half hour passed before they let them out with malicious jokes and laughter. Nathalie and Gourakin had regained their self-possession by that time, and when the door was opened they were sitting quietly conversing, but Nathalie was pale, and soon left.

From that evening she gave Michail her love; all her life seemed to hold only one thought—of him—jealous and torturing. Michail gave himself up to his first love with all

the ardour of his nature, but at the same time he enjoyed to the full also the amusements and pleasures of a worldly life, and the demands upon his time, the fits of jealousy, and in general the uneven character of Volynskaia sometimes rather oppressed him. She did not know how to be prudent, and their liaison soon ceased to be a secret. Gourakin's comrades, who loved him for his sunny nature, slightly envied him his good fortune, and this flattered his self-love.

From the day that Volynskaia knew that she was to be a mother, she decided to leave her husband and become the wife of Gourakin.

This decision cost her many sleepless nights and struggles with her conscience, as she very well knew that the baby's father was Volynsky, and not Gourakin. She knew it, and yet she went on with her deceit in her endeavour to conquer happiness. With a woman's unfailing instinct she felt that Michail would consider it his duty to marry her on learning that he was the father of the expected child. And she had not been mistaken in her calculations: he submitted to her wishes without a murmur.

Volynsky had astonished her by his extraordinary reserve and sang-froid when he had listened to her confession. He made no reproach, but he categorically refused to consent to a divorce, and declared the expected child to be his own. During the summer Volynskaia had not seen Gourakin for two months, as he had gone to his father's estate. Volynsky, as well as Nathalie, knew quite well that he was the father of the coming child. From that day Nathalie had suffered torments. A feeling of aversion had been added to the unfriendliness which she nurtured towards her husband. He became physically loathsome to her, since by the very fact of her position she seemed to have acknowledged his rights over her, which at that time could only belong to the man whom she loved. She was fighting desperately for her happiness, but everything seemed to be against her. When, after a long struggle, her husband had consented to the divorce, obstacles began to be raised by Michail's relatives, and he himself had become irritable, hot-tempered,

and was drinking deeply. Nathalie was losing strength in the struggle. It seemed to her that Gourakin's love was growing colder, that he would not be able to vanquish the obstacles, and in the end would cease to love her. . . .

Nathalie started; the latchkey had turned, the sound of spurs was heard.

"Misha! . . . At last! . . ."

Nathalie rushed to the door and threw her arms round Gourakin's neck.

"It was well that you left a note, or else I would have tormented myself as I did last time. Naughty! . . . Bad boy! . . . I do not sleep at night through you. Why did you not come last time, and not even send a note? I waited until six o'clock. . . . I got such a nervous headache that I could not go to the ballet. Why are you silent? Speak: why did you not come?"

"How can I speak when you are talking all the time? Wait a bit, Nathalie, let me go, and sit quiet a little while. I have just come from *grand'maman*. My father arrived yesterday."

"Yes, I know."

"From where do you know it?"

"I'll tell you afterwards. Well, and how did your conference end?"

Gourakin shrugged his shoulders.

"Each one of us kept to his own decision. My father is leaving to-night. He is terribly angry with me, and for my disobedience he is punishing me through my pocket: over and above the monthly allowance that I am receiving at present he will not add a single copeck. The old man is very, very angry. . . . Well, God bless him, only . . ."

"What—only?" asked Nathalie; her face had been changing colour from paleness to the dark red of anger while Gourakin was speaking.

"But it is damned little! Not a month passes but I have to borrow money from my uncle; it is scarcely sufficient for me alone, and what shall it be for two? . . . You are accustomed to a good life. I fear for you. . . ."

"Misha, I am prepared for anything, I will consent to

anything, only not to be separated from you. I am sure my uncle will not discontinue my allowance of two thousand a year which he is paying me since my marriage. One can live on seven thousand roubles, especially as you will be receiving something for your service."

Gourakin smiled contemptuously.

"A pittance, which shall not even suffice for cabs."

"Certainly it will not be easy for us at first, but, my dearest, is this temporary sacrifice so very great for our happiness? My uncle is very old, we will not have long to wait. After his death we will have several millions."

"You are talking like a schoolgirl, Nathalie: 'There will be this, there will be that.' . . . The thing is that at present there is nothing, and not what there will be in future."

Gourakin suddenly lost his temper; he pushed the chair with his foot, his spur caught the corner of the carpet, and he got still angrier.

"What is it, Misha? I scarcely seem to recognize you these last days. I might think you are repenting, and that you do not desire our marriage."

"Stop talking nonsense. You know very well that our position is atrocious, and enough to make anyone angry."

"No, I do not see it at all. There will be very little money, but that will not be for long. . . ."

"And to throw up one's regiment, to leave Petersburg for devil knows where, to have to live on a pittance, when we both have been accustomed to live almost in palaces. . . . Is all that nothing?"

"Oh, I see that your love has really grown cold. I see that the idea of marriage is weighing on you, that I may please you only as a mistress, that the child is not a joy, but a burden to you. . . . You are like all the others . . . you . . ."

"Stop! . . . Do you hear me, Nathalie?—enough! . . . Again scenes, again caprices! What do you want from me at last? I am doing all I can, even more than I can: I am sacrificing my old father's peace of mind and quarrelling with him, grieving *grand'maman*, who is ill through

me, giving up my beloved regiment, and you still find that it is too little. What other proofs of my love do you want?"

After his fast life and the unpleasant conversations with his father Gourakin was in that nervous, excitable state of mind when the least pretext for a misunderstanding may easily grow into a quarrel, to give vent to the feeling of irritation.

"You may rest assured: I do not want anything at all. I have been lowering myself too much as it is, listening to your complaints, or to the stupid exhortations of that old maid, your aunt. . . ."

"What did you say? What aunt? . . ."

Gourakin turned quickly towards Nathalie.

"Marie, of course. . . . Only she alone could be capable of creating out of her old maid's love a sort of melodrama. She came to me this morning and implored me to give you up. If I had ordered her to do it, she would have gone down on her knees before me. Such idiocy! Why are they all so mad? *Je ne suis pas une demi-mondaine.* . . . She is an old maid, and therefore . . ."

"Nathalie! Not a word more. . . . Not a word . . . or else I . . . Do you hear! . . . Aunt Marie is a saint; I reverence her as if she were my mother; either do not pronounce her name before me, or, if you do, then only with the utmost respect. I do not see anything extraordinary in that she came to you. She loves me, and my happiness is dearer to her than anything else."

"Allow me: from what you say it is clear that to marry me will be a great misfortune for you. . . . This is too much! Perhaps Mademoiselle Gourakina came to me with your consent? . . ."

"Devil knows what you are saying! Enough of scenes for me. I am going. . . ."

Mad with rage, Gourakin took up his cap. Nathalie felt a spasm at her throat. She would like to throw herself at his feet and ask his pardon with tears of repentance, but instead she laughed cruelly.

"Welcome. You evidently wish me to ask you not to

return any more. Your wish is fulfilled—you are free. You may go. . . ."

While Nathalie by a kind of malevolent inertia was saying just the contrary to what she was feeling, Gourakin, biting his lips and hardly able to contain his wrath, threw his cloak over his shoulders and, banging the door, left the house. Nathalie made a step towards the hall as if to follow him, then turned slowly to the sofa, sank down on it, and, laying her head on the silken cushion, burst into hysterical sobbing. It seemed as if with Michail's departure all had crumbled in ruins around her, and she remained alone among enemies to continue her sad life.

Two days later Marie Gourakina had just dressed, and was going to bend her knees in morning prayer, when the maid, after knocking at the door, handed her a letter, whispering mysteriously that an answer was expected, and as soon as possible. On perceiving Volynskaia's signature, Marie turned pale.

Nathalie wrote: "Forgive me! I am losing my reason, I am going mad. Misha says you are a saint, and I am ready to beg you on my knees—help me. Misha has quarrelled with me; for two days I have been writing to him, begging him to return to me and forgive me, but he does not answer. If he abandons me, I will not survive it. I will die. I will kill myself. . . . You exhorted me to give him up; now I am imploring you to give him back to me. You, of course, will understand, dear Marie, that I must have reached the utmost limits of despair to dare to write to you. If you turn from me, then I will understand that all is at an end. Misha adores you, and will obey all you say. . . . Do not push me down into the abyss. You are a Christian; you have a meek, all-forgiving heart. . . . Once more I ask you to forgive and save me."

After reading this letter Marie stood for several minutes in deep thought; then she went down on her knees before the ikons and began to pray. Her simple kindly face reflected the warmth and depth of the faith which filled her soul.

"Lord, guide me . . . Lord Almighty, teach me . . . ," her lips whispered. When she rose, her face had a peaceful and sorrowful expression. Going up to her old-fashioned mahogany writing-table, on which lay several English books, a volume of "Imitation de Jésus Christ," an open copy-book in which she kept her diary, and some photographs of her father, mother, and Michail, she wrote on a sheet of notepaper:

"I promise you to speak to Misha to-day. Pray with all your heart; do not give way to despair. I will also pray for you."

On dispatching this note, Marie wrote another one to her nephew, urgently asking him to come to her the same day. Then she passed into the dining-room and prepared the coffee with her own hands. Nine o'clock struck, and the rustle of silk was heard in the neighbouring room. With noiseless footsteps old Mme. Gourakina entered, and behind her came Miss Jones, smiling and drawing her lips in and out.

In the evening Michail called on his aunt. He seemed very low-spirited, and Marie could see that he was passing through a heavy and hard struggle. In talking to her he neither gave way to temper nor uttered any complaints, as if comprehending that from that moment it was for him, alone and independently, to lead his life along a certain course. On reading Nathalie's letter which his aunt had received in the morning, he sighed heavily.

"Yes, I foresaw this. . . . Of course, I will make it up with her, but"—he frowned and rubbed his hand across his forehead—"but if you only knew, auntie, how insufferable these scenes are, how they estrange one, and how I foresee that there will be no end to them."

He left Marie early, and instead of going to the theatre, where his friends were awaiting him, he went home. The porter told him that the Prince had gone out, and the Princess had visitors. Michail passed into his room and gave orders to say that he was not at home if he were asked for. He was feeling sick at heart, and a desire for solitude came over him to think out some things and to

take a final decision. The footman lighted the lamps and two candles on the writing-table and stopped near the door, awaiting orders; he was not accustomed to see Michail at home so early; he generally did not come in before the morning.

"You may go. If I want you, I shall ring," said Gourakin, seating himself at his writing-table and opening a letter in Nathalie's well-known handwriting, which he found lying there. On a perfumed sheet with a monogram some lines ran, the letters blurred in places where the tears had fallen on them. The servant had closed the heavy door noiselessly, and the room was quite quiet. Michail read the letter, laid it aside, and, leaning his head on his hand, he sat absorbed in thought. During the last two days since he had quarrelled with Nathalie, he had become convinced that his love for her had grown much colder, and that in the depths of his heart he had been nurturing a hope that she had seen this and that her pride would not allow her to seek a reconciliation. Their liaison had seemed beautiful and enticing, but Nathalie as a wife appeared in another and dimmer light. Faithful to the severe traditions of the families of the old nobility, Michail looked on marriage with great respect, and although not fearing it, he nevertheless acknowledged to himself that he was unprepared for the serious and responsible duties of a married man; and the idea of losing his freedom so early in life weighed on him and oppressed him. The material prospect of the impending step also helped to increase his dejection. He saw clearly that by his marriage with Nathalie he was giving up a merry, easy and brilliant life. The passionate love which she had killed with scenes of jealousy and exhibitions of a small-minded capricious nature could never be revived.

"I am putting my neck into a noose. Father is quite right, all are right, but what am I to do? . . ." thought Michail, walking up and down the room with his hands behind his back and head bent low. "She desires it. . . . It was I who thrust myself into her life . . . but especially —the child . . . the child . . . our child! . . . I must, I

have no right. . . . It would be dishonourable and base. . . . She loves and trusts me, she believes in my honour. . . . Oh, the money, the horrid money! . . ." Michail frowned, on the one hand reconciling himself with the necessity of marrying, and on the other suddenly remembering how completely his life would be changed owing to lack of funds.

Besides the financial aspect, he was greatly grieved by the necessity of leaving his regiment, which he loved with a special and sincere love. He had merged his life with that of his regiment; he was so proud of it, and so fond of his comrades, from whom his marriage would now inevitably separate him. He stopped before his writing-table, on which stood a large photograph of Nathalie. He remembered clearly their first meeting at a party given by a high official, and the impression of inaccessibility that she had made on him when he saw her in her gorgeous toilet, with her beautiful bare shoulders and gay, slightly mocking smile. She had entered with her husband; he looked very handsome in his court dress embroidered with gold. Michail was presented to her; with a respectful bow he had kissed the tips of her fingers, which she had extended to him with the coquettish and condescending smile of a woman accustomed to adulation. Could he have thought then! . . . And how quickly and unexpectedly had it all occurred afterwards! And now this proud woman, so much above him, as it then seemed to him, was to bear a child, his child! . . . A complicated wave of pride and warm feeling overflowed his heart. She was going to be the mother of his child! . . . Yes, he must marry her, he must call the child his own.

With a feeling of emotion, which he experienced every time that he thought of Nathalie as the mother of his child, he sat down to the table and wrote her a conciliating letter appointing a rendezvous on the following day.

VIII

PRINCE ALEXEI VASSILIEVITCH had just finished dinner. Having drunk his wine and smoked his cigar, he passed from the dining-room into his own apartments, and ringing up his valet, a faithful, ever silent man, he proceeded to change his dress.

"Have you delivered the flowers and fruit all right, Tikhon?" asked the Prince, smoothing his whiskers before a large mirror which reflected his gigantic figure and oval, high-bred face with the prominent broad chin.

"Just so, Your Excellency, I delivered them myself. I was ordered to say that you are in disgrace, because you were not there yesterday."

"Well, well, I am going now." The Prince hurried to button his coat, and hastily took from Tikhon a perfumed handkerchief and a pair of white chamois-leather gloves.

"I was not there yesterday . . . and so we have caught it, brother Tikhon, both of us. . . . Tell them to send the carriage there by eleven, and put my medicine in the left pocket—my heart is somewhat wrong again."

The old valet stifled a sigh; on seeing the Prince out of his apartments, he looked after him with devoted and sorrowful eyes.

"Lord Jesus Christ! . . . That is a Prince's life: no peace here, no joy there. . . ."

After passing by several houses, Prince Alexei entered the door of a small private house. The porter, with a respectful bow, caught the cloak that he threw off in passing. Without waiting to be announced the Prince passed the *salon* and drawing-room, where sounds of a woman's merry laughter were heard.

"A-a, the dear Prince! I told Masha that you would come to-day, but she is terribly angry with you." A lively

beautiful blonde woman with grey eyes and arched dark eyebrows ran up to the Prince with a laugh.

"How are you, my beauty? Good-evening, Maroussia."

The Prince went up to a tall large woman who was arranging her flaxen-coloured hair at one of the wall mirrors and stood with her back to him.

This was the dancer Petrova, the mistress of the Prince.

"I am angry with you." She extended her hand without looking at him. "What do you mean by not coming when you are asked and expected? God knows when we sat down to supper yesterday through you."

"I assure you, my dearest, that I could not possibly come. I was at the palace. . . ."

"I don't care where you were! . . . If I call you—you are to be here. . . . Lath-back! . . ."

The blonde woman burst into laughter.

"Now, Masha, you are really without shame to teaze the Prince so. You have spoilt her, dear Prince; that is why she is showing you her temper."

The Prince, with an indefinite smile, took off the glove from his left hand and, laying it with his cap on a neighbouring table, sat down on a low sofa, covered, like all the rest of the furniture, with crimson and black satin; a crimson plush carpet lay on the floor; a quantity of flowers, pictures, expensive vases and statuettes adorned the room.

"Why did you leave the ballet so early the day before yesterday, dear Prince? I was at my best; I danced so that I did not feel the floor under my feet. How they applauded! They made me repeat the Cracoviak three times. And you were not there," the blonde lady, the well-known ballet-dancer Girard, a favourite of the public and the pride of the ballet, was saying, gazing coquettishly at the Prince, with eyes sparkling with fun and merriment.

"I had to be at the Countess Oushakoff's ball."

"Do you not weary of all your countesses and princesses?"

"Sometimes I do," answered the Prince with a smile.

"I don't believe it!" Petrova shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

She was vulgar, and could not boast of special beauty, and yet the Prince, a connoisseur in women, well known for his noble birth and fortune, was in absolute submission before this ballet-dancer, whose childhood had been passed in a laundry.

"If you were really weary of them, you would not pass the days and nights with them," she continued, taking up and shuffling a pack of cards. "Who was there at the ball?"

"The usual lot: the Naryshkins, Sheremetieffs, the Grand Dukes, the Orloffs. . . . All were there."

"And the handsomest of all, your nephew—Gourakin?" asked Girard.

"Misha? No, Misha was not there."

"Probably Volynskaia did not let him go," laughed Petrova. "Ugh! what a crosspatch she must be! I think she would be capable of tearing a man to pieces from jealousy. These are the women that you deserve. I love such ones. Tell me, Prince, is it true that a few days ago she boxed his ears either in a hall or when leaving the carriage?"

"What nonsense! From where have you heard that?"

"No, it is not nonsense," interrupted Girard. "I also heard of it. She was jealous of someone; I wouldn't marry her for anything in the world, in his place; she will spoil all his life. With Volynsky it is different; although he is a silent man, but he would know how to pacify her."

"Yes, Misha is certainly too young, and it is a pity that he got himself involved in this scandal. . . ."

"Ah, Mashenka, I quite forgot! . . . Lay the cards for me, please. I want it so much, so much."

"And I—must I go away?" asked the Prince, rising from his chair.

"No, no, dear Prince"—Girard caught him by the sleeve —"you know all my secrets. Go on, Mashenka."

"And afterwards, Maroussia, tell me my fortune; you are a great hand at reading the future."

"I can tell it you without laying the cards: I'll throw you over some fine day, and you will be left with your lawful

spouse. You will then serve your *Te Deums* together, and her priest will make you do penance. . . ."

"Do stop your teasing, Masha. Do not believe her, dear Prince; she'll never throw you over, because she will never find so kind a friend as you. Well, go on. Here, I have shuffled and cut."

Petrova proceeded to lay the cards with her large white hand adorned with valuable rings. A footman brought in the tea on a silver tray. The Prince listened abstractedly to what Petrova was foretelling her friend. Slowly sipping his tea, he followed each gesture, each movement of her white and red face, with the snub nose and full red lips. This face was not distinguished by its beauty, but everything in this woman possessed an irresistible and attractive power for the Prince. Gentle and delicate by nature, with her he became completely without a will of his own. Highly refined himself, he meekly submitted to all her rude and cynical remarks, satisfying all her fancies and not noticing her greed and her quarrelsome temper. After the fortune-telling the subject of the talk was the ballet. All the scandalous stories were mentioned, in which many names of the *grand monde* played a part. Without crossing the thresholds of the *salons* of the high society the ballet-dancers knew all that went on there, because not only the dashing youth of the capital, but also mature old statesmen, were well acquainted with the fairies of the choreographic art.

Often finding the time tedious at the official gatherings of their own circles, they willingly escaped to the *salons* of the ballet divas, where the gaiety was unconstrained, the masculine element was the same, and the ladies were delightful comrades and merry, fascinating women. The Prince listened to the chatter of the two friends, placing a remark here and there, and feeling himself much happier and cosier in this small red boudoir than in the stately apartments of his wife. He was seen there very rarely now, so that they only met at meals. The Prince had long ago transferred all his affections to this house, and his attachment to Petrova increased with the years.

"We had a fine drive with Ania to-day on the quay." Petrova turned to the Prince, lazily stretching herself and extending her feet in red satin slippers trimmed with fur towards the chair opposite. The Prince moved the chair to a more convenient position, caressingly touching the feet in the pretty slippers which he had lately brought from Paris. "But it is not to my advantage to be seen with her; all eyes are turned to her, and she is very glad," laughed Petrova, gazing at her friend.

"That is only your fancy, Masha," smiled Girard, showing a row of dazzling teeth.

"My fancy! And you, smiling right and left and making eyes! You are insatiable; you find one admirer not enough. . . . You'll see, you'll lose your neck some day."

"How will I lose it?" Girard looked at her friend in astonishment.

"Some crazy jealous fellow will fall in love and send a bullet through your forehead."

"Oh, I am not afraid of that!" laughed Girard. "By the time it comes to the bullet, I will empty their pockets in such a way that there will be no money left to buy the bullet. Ah, I am in love, dear Prince, madly in love," she said, making a suffering face and laughing at the same time, her head leaning against the back of the chair.

"May I ask with whom?" asked the Prince.

"Your brother."

"Vladimir? I will tell him."

"He knows. He is not free for the time. . . . I must wait patiently."

The Prince looked at his watch and stretched out his hand for his cap.

"Where to?" asked Petrova with a slight frown.

"I have to go, my angel: nothing to be done. Mme. Potemkina has a party to-night, and asked me specially to be there—I cannot stay away."

"That's piggish on your part, to pass almost all the evenings in your *beau-monde*. . . ."

"Maroussia, but it has only happened so this week."

"Well, then, go, get away with you and welcome, and Ania and I shall directly ring up our company and go to supper at Borel's. We'll do finely without you. Go and turn your French compliments before your trained dolls, while we'll be amusing ourselves."

"There you are, Maroussia, again angry with me! But if you knew how willingly I would not go to this party and how I dislike having to be away from you! You know my position: I am obliged to do many things which I do not want to."

"I have heard that many times!" Petrova answered with a contemptuous grimace.

The Prince rose with a grieved expression, bowed in silence before Girard, touched Petrova's forehead with his lips, and left the room.

"You do tease him too much, Masha," protested Girard as soon as the Prince had gone. "He cannot be tied to your petticoat; his high position obliges him to show himself in society."

"Ah, shut up, please, with his high position!" Petrova cried in a temper. "I don't care a fig for it. What have I to do with it? They are all rascals and scoundrels. Do you think it is pleasant to have an illegitimate child? A great honour to be a mistress!"

"But he cannot marry you, Mashenka. . . ."

"Whereas he can live two lives! He has a lawful spouse, children; he lives in a palace, the woman he does not love has all the honours and pleasures; and what am I?—a paid mistress! . . . My child is not worse than his princeling, and what honour does he get? What is his name? Why such injustice? Because the other woman is ugly and a fright, who has long grown indifferent to him, and I—am his love, whom he worships, before whom he grovels on his knees. Therein lies his baseness, that although he kisses my feet, he guards his princely rank, and though I die, he will not pass a certain limit."

"You are crazy, Masha! But who would allow him to marry you? And what about his wife? The laws? He dares not ever think of it."

"If he dares not think of it, then he had no right to tempt me; and, having tempted, let him bear my caprices."

"Have you forgotten how you nearly jumped up to the ceiling in the green-room when he told you of his love. I remember it well, Mashenka. You have become too much spoilt. What do you lack? From poverty you have come into luxury; you are spoilt, beloved, he is so good and kind, and still you do not find it enough. What would rank bring you? Their life is deadly dull. I would not take it at a gift."

"You are one thing, I am another. You only want to fly about the scene, turning people's heads, and having a new man to kiss every night."

"O-oh, I see that you are in a regular temper to-night. Good-bye. Shall you be at the rehearsal to-morrow?"

"Certainly."

"Then don't be late, or else 'he' 'll be in no end of a temper again. And after the rehearsal we are going to the Yussoupoff Gardens to the skating rink. Fogelberg promised to come; no one can drive the sleighs down the ice-mountains better than he. A whole party is coming; it will be very gay."

Girard was putting on her sable cap before the looking-glass and enumerating the names of the young officers of the Life Guards who were to be there.

IX

ASCENDING the marble staircase, decorated with palms, statues and bronze figures, with lackeys in livery embroidered with golden crests, white silk stockings, and black shoes with gold buckles, placed at every five steps, the Prince tried to chase away all sad thoughts and to give to his features a serene and amiable expression. Under such a mask most people hide their inner selves, so as not to differ from the general aspect of well brought up persons.

Two enormous lustres with candles illuminated the sumptuous white ballroom decorated with gold. From the drawing-rooms came the sound of voices and laughter; the air smelt of flowers and perfumes. The Prince stopped for a moment before a mirror, passed his hand over his hair and moustache, sighed, closed his eyes for a second, and entered a drawing-room. His face now wore an expression of serenity, unconcern and amiability. The hostess, a lady invested with the order of knighthood, of middle height, with a handsome face of the pure Slavonic type, and flaxen hair arranged in a high coiffure, rose to meet him.

"Late as usual, my dear Prince. You certainly know how to make yourself eagerly desired," said she, extending her hand and looking at the Prince with her large blue eyes.

"I was at the Michel Theatre," said Prince Alexei. Mme. Naptal Arno was exquisite in 'Qui femme a, guerre a.'"

In the spacious drawing-room, decorated in the Louis XVI. style, with exquisite Aubussons on the walls and floor, a beautifully painted ceiling, enormous candelabra of Saxon porcelain and similar lustres, lit up with numbers of candles, a small but select company was assembled. The Prince would not take tea, which was served on a large

round table, and he sank down in a chair beside the hostess. Footmen in evening dress, black stockings and shoes with golden buckles were serving noiselessly. Separate groups had gathered in conversation. The subjects were the increasing rebellion, the murder of the excellent governor of a province, Prince K., the Empress's illness, the manifesto of the Revolutionary Committee, demanding the amnesty of political criminals, the acquittal of Zasoulitch, which was universally approved of, the unsuccessful attempt on the life of the Chief of the Gendarmes, the still more bold and unsuccessful attempt against the life of the Tsar. These were unruly times, and in the drawing-rooms the chief topic of conversation was the political situation inside the country.

"I saw our director and innovator to-day," a Minister was saying to the Prince; he was an imposing old man with a slow, slightly affected manner of speaking and an expression of strict pedantry. "His aiming at popularity will result in leading him into extravagancies. I am afraid that he will create a platform for himself out of his post to play an actor's part. We expect good service for the benefit of the State from him, but it appears, in my opinion, to resemble more a play at a fair."

"Yes"—a Member of the Council of Empire and possessor of a well-known name, an enormous fortune, and a lovely wife, put in his word—"to be a dictator, and in such times as these, is much more complicated than to conduct the siege of Kars."

"Is it true that *il fait des chicanes à Count Tonkoff?*" asked the hostess, evidently thinking of something else, for her look was constantly straying to the door leading from the large *salon.*

"*Chicanes!*—that is not strong enough. He tries to injure him and set traps for him at every step," smiled Prince Alexei. "But the Count is positively invulnerable—*il est invulnérable,*" he repeated in French.

"*Un vrai* gentleman," remarked an oldish maid of honour in a severe black silk dress, with a pale and thin face. "What breeding, what tact the dear Count has! I really

cannot understand by whom and how the absurd idea was conceived to give such a responsible post to *cet Arménien! . . .*"

"The pest helped him in this case," said the Prince again with a smile, thinking at the same time whether he would have time to-morrow to see Petrova before dinner.

"Well, we do not quite believe in the pest here," remarked the Minister.

At this moment Volynsky entered the room. The hostess's face expressed relief, and her glance flew towards the part of the room where the Duchess was seated surrounded by a group of ladies and gentlemen.

All seemed to have been expecting Volynsky. While he was bending down over the ladies' hands, they all jestingly reproved him for being so late. His appearance brought some animation. The ladies knew him to be a fine connoisseur and admirer not only of the beauty, but also of the smallest details of their dresses. The news of his consent to the divorce with his wife made him still more interesting in women's eyes. While respectfully kissing the Duchess's hand he felt her fingers press his for one moment nervously and insistently. When he raised his eyes to hers a scarcely perceptible significant smile hovered round her mouth.

"Sit down here, *cher monsieur*," she pointed to a chair standing opposite to her seat, "and do not dare to talk politics. *J'en ai par dessus la tête.* We have just been discussing jealousy. These ladies affirm that there is nothing so terrible as jealous scenes. What will you say to this?"

"Pavel Konstantinovitch will of course say nothing. He is too far removed from such displays of human weakness to judge of them," exclaimed one of the ladies with a malicious look at Volynsky.

Volynsky was smiling a slight enigmatic smile; his eyes were slightly narrowed, and he was stroking the fingers of one hand with the other.

"Madame is mistaken," he said to the lady who had spoken last. "If I do not know the feeling of jealousy, it is only because no woman has ever permitted me to love her to such a degree that I would dare to express my love

in outbursts of jealousy; and in respect to myself I do not know jealousy because no woman has ever loved me so much as to be jealous of me."

Volynsky bowed his head slightly, as if expressing his complete submission to the women who had loved him so poorly.

"Shall I tell you one thing?" said the Duchess with smiling eyes: "it is that I do not believe you! . . ."

The filmy white lace on her low-cut dress rose and fell with her breathing. For a few seconds Volynsky let his eyes rest on this place of her beautiful breast and then turned them away, but the Duchess caught the look, and her fine nostrils quivered.

"And if such a woman could be found and would permit you to be jealous of her?" she asked, negligently tapping her armchair with her fan.

"I would torment her to death both with my jealousy and my love," answered Volynsky in a completely dispassionate voice, and only the Duchess alone caught a meaning in his calm glance.

"And do you believe him?" asked Prince Alexei, who had grown tired of politics and been listening to what was going on in the animated groups surrounding the Duchess.

"Not the least in the world," laughed she.

The Prince joined their group, and the conversation, dealing all the time of questions of love, pleased and occupied everyone. An atmosphere of unconstrained merriment and warmth seemed always to reign round the Duchess. The Prince added still more to it, because he was always willing to speak of women and love.

"They say that Volynsky is definitely being divorced from his wife?" the hostess's neighbour, a Member of the Council of Empire, asked her in a low voice.

"Yes, I know this. Michail Gourakin is leaving his regiment; he is going to marry Volynskaia and live in Moscow."

"What idiocy!" The Minister shook his head. "On both sides it is idiotic. I am very sorry for poor old Gourakina. I hear she has fallen ill of grief, and that poor

Marie is crying all day long, and does not know on whose side she is to be. Old Gourakin has quarrelled with his son, and it seems he means to disinherit him. All this is very sad."

"What do you want?" the hostess smiled. "Such is the voice of passion. . . ."

The Minister was silent. The hostess was the widow of a statesman, and had a serious love affair with a personage so highly placed that the Minister did not deem it advisable to speak with blame of feelings of love.

"Why is the Princess Anna Valerianovna not here, *chère amie?*" the maid of honour asked the hostess.

"She does not go anywhere at present, and does not like to be pressed and begged to come. I pity her very much; she is very unhappy because of that creature . . . you know whom I mean?"

"Yes, the ballet is the fashion now," said the maid of honour sarcastically.

"If it had been Girard, I would not have been surprised, but this one! . . . How could she win the Prince's heart? It is wonderful!"

The hostess said the last sentence in a whisper, and looked towards the other end of the room where the Prince was sitting.

"I hear that the Princess has taken to mysticism or spiritism in her disappointment?" asked the Member of the Council of Empire, and adroitly throwing up his eyeglass into his eye by means of an imperceptible movement of his fingers.

"Not spiritism; she has given herself up to religion and good works," said the maid of honour impressively. "And with it all she has a really fiendish disposition."

The Member of the Council of Empire moved his eyebrows slightly, and the eyeglass fell out again.

"I am entirely on the Prince's side, and I do not wonder at his flight from his hearthstone."

"It is very difficult to judge in these cases," said the hostess with a smile, and the two dimples on her cheeks made her winning little face still more fascinating.

A little farther off, beside a table laden with fruit and bonbons, a fatuous aide-de-camp was conversing with a tall shaven statesman in evening dress, decorated with many orders.

"There is dancing to-morrow *chez les anglais*," the aide-de-camp was saying, twirling his moustache with two fingers. "Are you going to be there, Prince?"

"I have to go," answered the statesman; "they say all the Court will be there. I dined at Countess Niniche's to-day, and I heard it from her."

"Ah, there is a delicious woman," said the aide-de-camp with rapture. "And what do you think of her husband, Prince?"

"Oh! I don't think much of him.... A skilful intriguer, but he will soon break his neck," answered the statesman, with a disdainful gesture, "and it is not I who will mourn his loss.... A caliph for an hour, believe me."

By the end of the evening the company had divided into two groups.

In the group of the Duchess and Volynsky, the animated conversation, interrupted with bursts of laughter, turned without ceasing on light-minded topics. Prince Alexei had forgotten his worries and Petrova's anger, and was exchanging with great pleasure joking, meaning phrases with the beautiful Baroness Shellman, a coquette known for her daring conduct. She was teasing the Prince, whom she had long been attracting by her beauty and provocative manner. But each time, as soon as he left her, the image of the ballet-dancer with the snub nose and authoritative manner instantly cast out all other fancies and impressions.

"Why are you never seen at the Taurid Gardens on the skating-rink! It is so very gay there," the Baroness was saying, fanning herself and enveloping the Prince in a whiff of perfume.

"I have no time, I am busy," answered the Prince, smiling into the pretty brown eyes of the Baroness.

"You are busy? Give me an hour of your busy time, *cher* Prince, and really you will not repent. Come now, be good, and be on the skating-rink at three o'clock to-morrow.

Fogelberg runs the sleighs down the mountains artistically. If you come, I will promise you . . . Now what do you want me to promise you?"

And the Baroness, slightly covering her face with her fan, bent it quite close to the Prince.

"Well—tell me what you would like. . . ."

At the other end of the room the Minister was the centre figure. Methodically, picturesquely and patiently he was relating an episode out of his life. When he talked everyone always listened to him, even when he spoke of quite ordinary things. Possessing the gift of eloquence and a well modulated voice, he held people's attention by means of the latter, as it flowed in distinct, metallic, slowly sounding waves.

Connected with the Court, having played an important political rôle during the whole time of the Emperor's reign, the Minister carried with him into the drawing-rooms the prestige of an historical personage in the life of Russia, and therefore a special weight was laid on each of his words, as if they could be understood only by the few initiated.

". . . This ikon," the Minister continued his story evoked by the talk on spiritism and mysticism, "was very much revered in my wife's family. It hung in a corner of our bedroom on a strong iron hook, which could easily support a bronze lustre. In my wife's family there was a tradition that this ikon falls down from the hook before the death of a member of the family. As soon as I heard of this tradition from my wife I made the hook fast with my own hands —*de mes propres mains j'ai consolidé l'image*—and I told her laughingly that we would all die before the holy image would ever fall down again. In 1872 we were passing the autumn in our estate. It was late at night. My wife had retired to bed, but I remained sitting at my writing-table in my study, as I had some pressing work to do. The whole house was plunged into a deep sleep. Suddenly a crash was heard as if something heavy had fallen. I ran out of my study and heard my wife calling to me in a frightened voice. In the bedroom on the floor lay the heavy image, with broken glass and lamp. My wife's mother was very

old, and the womenfolk of the house were sure that the fall of the image forebode her death. However, the old lady lived five years after that, but my wife died suddenly from paralysis of the heart some four days after the fall of the image."

The Minister, on finishing the story, remained in the same slightly affected attitude; he sat in his armchair, very straight, his back barely touching that of the chair.

"*C'est incroyable!*" said the maid of honour in the awed voice in which one speaks of incomprehensible and mysterious events.

The Minister was the first to leave, and after him all the rest began to make their adieux to the hostess and to each other. The Duchess stopped on the threshold of the *salon* for a few words with the hostess.

Volynsky, bearing on his arm the ermine cape that the Duchess had given him to carry, was slowly descending the stairs. At the bottom the voices of the departing guests were heard, and the opening and closing of the heavy front door. On hearing the rustle of silk behind him Volynsky stopped, and turned towards the Duchess, who was rapidly approaching him. Adroitly holding up the train of her violet silk dress so that Volynsky standing below could see her slender feet clad in the violet silk stockings, smiling and shrugging her bare shoulders in the cool air, the Duchess was running down the stairs with light steps. Volynsky carefully covered her shoulders with the cape and offered her his arm. The door closed below, and all was quiet.

"Shall you be at the *concours hyppique* to-morrow?" asked the Duchess as the footman in the red livery of the Court was placing her ermine-lined cloak on her shoulders.

"If you command me," answered Volynsky.

"Certainly, I command it. . . ." The Duchess narrowed her eyes, and her face assumed an expression of intense desire.

Volynsky bowed his head respectfully as a sign of humble obedience. At the door the Duchess's carriage was waiting with a coachman in the same red livery as the footmen

"Send away your carriage; you can come with me," said the Duchess at the moment when Volynsky was respectfully touching her hand with his lips, and the footman, holding the door of the carriage, was preparing to close it.

Volynsky ordered his own coachman to go home and entered the Duchess's carriage.

"I have been admiring you the whole evening," said the Duchess in French, leaning back in the carriage and placing her feet in the fur bag lying on the floor. "You were wonderfully self-possessed, and looking at you and listening to you, one might think that your path is full of roses. . . ."

Volynsky was silent.

"Tell me frankly, as a friend, leaving aside all the disagreeable sides of this story, are you very much grieved that she is leaving you? Do you truly suffer?" asked the Duchess, lowering her voice and making it sound more sincerely cordial.

"I am afraid to answer this question, as whatever I may say at this moment may be not quite so as it really is."

"How well you know how not to answer a question put to you!" laughed the Duchess. "How I would like to break through the enchanted circle in which you stand and through which no mortal is allowed to penetrate. . . . Your Olympian calm. . . ."

"How if that is only a mask?"

"Oh no, I do not believe that! But if it is so, then for one moment take off the mask which hides your face, that I have been wanting to see for so long."

In the darkness of the carriage Volynsky could not see how much insistent, stubborn will shone in each feature of this woman who was so spoilt by everyone. He closed his eyes for a second, as if not wishing to confide their expression even to the darkness.

"Why are you silent? I want to know what you have to say to this."

"I will take off this mask only for the woman who will become completely mistress of my will," answered Volynsky in his usual calm tone of voice.

"And whom you will torment to death with your jealousy and your love?" said the Duchess playfully, repeating the phrase that Volynsky had uttered. "And do you think that such a woman can exist for you?" she continued after a moment's silence.

Volynsky bit his underlip, and tightly clasping the glove which he held in his right hand, in his endeavour to overcome an irresistibly strong desire, at last succeeded in mastering it.

"I think that such a woman cannot exist for me."

"Why?"

"Because I believe in the game of love, but I never believed in love itself."

"Oh, if that is your attitude . . ."

"Am I not right? Be sincere, your Highness; do you think otherwise yourself?" Volynsky turned to the Duchess, approached his face to her, and by the light of a passing lantern she saw two mocking eyes fixed on her.

"At any rate, I believe that there is and must be real love."

"Can it be you who say that, Duchess? You are jesting, I know that you are jesting. . . ."

"Don't laugh! I do not want you to laugh so. I am not jesting; but don't let us speak of it any more."

"As you will."

Volynsky closed his eyes and bowed his head. The carriage stopped at the palace. The Duchess extended the tips of her fingers to Volynsky, and with the words, "*À demain*," disappeared behind the open doors. The same carriage brought Volynsky home. He ascended the dimly lighted staircase, passed on to his own apartments, undressed, gave some orders to his sleepy valet, and went to bed. It was late, and he had had to make a great effort of his will to remain outwardly calm all the time. He had consented to a divorce with his wife because he understood that if he did not do it the scandal would be greater still. Knowing and guessing at the frame of mind of society, he had learnt from his conversation with the Duchess that the lighter-minded and larger part of their circle was sympathizing with the passionate love between his wife and

the handsome Gourakin, that their liaison was universally known, and that the sooner she were wedded to Gourakin the less ground would there be for gossip and slanderous tales. But the thought of the child, that he had been hoping for so many years in vain, tortured him and deprived him of his equanimity. He knew that Nathalie was declaring the father of the expected child to be Gourakin; he had heard that Gourakin believed this, and that everyone who was aware of her position believed it also.

Volynsky, however, knew as surely, as well as his wife did, that the father of the child was he himself. The feeling of paternal love was clamouring in him; this feeling was insulted. He had long ago become indifferent to his wife, and the separation from her did not grieve him, but to renounce the child, to give it up to his unworthy wife and that boy Gourakin, was both painful and insulting to him. However, lately these thoughts had tormented him much less. They were distracted by a new experience which he did not stop to analyze, but to which he was submitting slowly. This experience was the new, as yet not quite clear, attitude of the all-enchanting Duchess towards himself. He was too great a connoisseur of women not to recognize all her merits, which turned the heads of all those who approached her in any way, but just because she was always surrounded by so many, he with his sensitive self-respect would not consent to swell the ranks of her admirers, and by an intentional exaggerated respect for her rank he created a gulf between them which she could not but notice. From the moment that Volynsky had learnt of his wife's misconduct and had finally estranged himself from her, his attention dwelt with greater frequency on the Duchess's personality. During the last year she had grown more fascinating, and the knowledge of her irresistibility made her still more attractive. Very cautiously and by degrees she had striven at each meeting with Volynsky to bridge over the gulf which he created between them, and the more difficult of attainment this was, the more obstinate she became in her desire. The game was begin-

ning to tantalize Volynsky. Accustomed to the admiration of women, he admitted as a result of this game not less than the complete surrender of the Duchess's will. From the moment that he had ascertained this, he had felt a great attraction towards the flighty, spoilt coquette, and he was still more on his guard in respect to each word, each look which he addressed to her.

X

PRINCESS ANNA VALERIANOVNA had been feeling in a bad temper since early morning. Olga Onisimovna, the head mistress of the orphan school, who had many years ago filled the post of attendant to the Princess and was well acquainted with the intimate side of her life, was generally held in strict subordination, and did not dare to open her mouth in the presence of her benefactress; but in respect to gossip and tale-bearing she enjoyed full liberty, and from time to time she used to lay out before the Princess a whole collection of tales. The Princess was very much interested in them, because they were always based on truth, and embraced all the sides of her life, especially the most sensitive part of it—namely, the liaison between her husband and the ballet-dancer Petrova. Olga Onisimovna's tongue seemed to unroll a series of cinema pictures of the intimate life of the princely husband in the private house so near to their own. Prince Alexei did not even suspect that his wife knew of every step of his. Very loyal, straightforward, and delicate himself, acknowledging the wrong that he was doing to his wife, he, ever since he had left her, avoided penetrating even casually into her private life. No one of those who surrounded him would have thought of spying or tale-bearing to the Prince, and therefore he could not admit that the Princess would stoop to spy and watch his liaison, which he was doing his utmost to keep secret. Petrova always tried to display publicly her conquest over the Prince, whom all the capital knew so well, and she treated him to terrible outbursts of temper when he endeavoured to mask his relations with her. The Prince did not know that by means of flattery and tips, obtained from her benefactress, Olga Onisimovna had managed to penetrate through the servants' entrance into the small private

house, and often came over to take a cup of tea with old Matriona Ivanovna, the mother of the ballet-dancer Petrova, a former laundress, who, now obese and old, was allowed to end her days in the servants' quarters of her daughter's house. Matriona Ivanovna never went farther than the pantry, and only caught occasional glimpses of the rooms in which her "Mashenka" dwelt. She lived at peace with the servants, was very much afraid of her own daughter, but also very much interested in all that she did, and knew of all that went on not only in her dressing-room at the theatre and the drawing-room, but in her bedroom as well.

Having nothing else to do all day but gossip with the servants, the old woman was very glad to make friends with Olga Onisimovna, and over innumerable cups of tea or coffee to report to her in a mysterious half whisper all that was going on in Mashenka's life. Shaking her grey old head, partly in blame, partly with approval, she used to relate to Olga Onisimovna all the details of how Mashenka was "fooling" the Prince.

"The money—the money that she just squeezes out of him is something awful!" she would mumble with her toothless mouth, wiping her lips with the palm of her hand and folding her hands on her fat lap, as she sat, hot and flushed, in her broad cotton gown, over her tea with her friend.

On the morning in question Princess Anna Valerianovna had been worried with one thing and another. As soon as she rose from her bed she had received a note from Father Fedor, informing her that his youngest daughter had fallen ill during the night, and that he would be unable to come to her for their morning talk. Father Fedor was a widower, living in a wing of the house, and fulfilling the functions of Father-confessor to the Princess. The latter, always very much interested in all that concerned the priest, was troubled by his news, and decided to visit him as soon as she was through with her business, which generally occupied her till two or three in the afternoon. Olga Onisimovna had made her angry by reporting to her that

Dashenka had fallen ill from grief, and the wedding with the peasant Afanassiy would have to be put off, in spite of the express desire of the Princess. She was always against all that was young, handsome, and striving for happiness, even deserving it. The intercession of Olga Onisimovna, and even of the Prince himself, in the case of Dashenka's fate had only succeeded in increasing the unconscious ill-will and envy of the homely, uncouth, and unsympathetic Princess, and she felt that it would be a relief to her when the beauty and grace of the poor orphan that she had brought up were trampled and crushed in the grey, dreary routine of a peasant's life. After handing in the reports of the school, to the accompaniment of cavilling remarks from the Princess, Olga Onisimovna, instead of retiring, coughed slightly, and remained standing in the same place. The Princess knew what the discreetly artificial cough of her quondam attendant meant. With a disagreeable, disdainful expression on her face she turned her head towards Olga Onisimovna.

"Again something new? Well, go on. . . ."

She laid her pen aside, took off her pince-nez, and prepared to listen.

"Your Excellency has not heard of the scandal in the theatre?" asked Olga Onisimovna, folding her hands in a servile manner.

"Ridiculous question!" The Princess shrugged her shoulders. "From whom could I have heard anything? But go on quickly—I have no time to lose."

Notwithstanding her painful curiosity and jealousy, the Princess always experienced a certain shame in listening to the tales of her quondam attendant, in which her husband shone in an unfavourable light. Olga Onisimovna now related to the Princess in all its details the story which had been passing from mouth to mouth among the ballet-dancers, and had penetrated into the society *salons*, where society, not wishing to blame the Prince, shrugged its shoulders, shook its head, raised its eyebrows, and summarized its impressions by expressing its sympathy for the weakness of the Prince, who was so kindly, such a gallant

man, who had had the misfortune to fall beneath the influence of a woman so vulgar and unworthy.

Two days ago the Prince had dined with Petrova and remained with her until it was time for her to go to the theatre, as she was dancing that evening. The Prince had brought her to the artists' entrance of the theatre and afterwards gone on to his box. Patiently awaiting the beginning of the play, and examining the arriving public from the depths of his box, the Prince was smoking abstractedly and thinking lovingly of Petrova, with whom he had passed several happy hours that day. Suddenly there was a knock at the door, and he was respectfully told that "Maria Mikhailovna Petrova asks His Excellency to be pleased to come to her immediately." The Prince rose directly and went behind the scenes with a feeling of anxiety. He was just passing into her dressing-room when he heard her laugh among other women's voices on the stage, and went up to her. He was immediately surrounded by the other ballet-dancers with friendly jokes and greetings. Some of them were already in tights, others were still in their ordinary dresses. Petrova, in a blue silk dressing-gown, her face already made up, was standing in the middle of the stage.

"Where are my tights?" she asked the Prince in a loud voice. "You must have seen that I went off in my dressing-gown."

"But, Mashenka . . ." said the Prince, slightly confused, "I really did not know that you had not taken them with you."

"How you did not know? You saw perfectly well that I got into the carriage with empty hands. . . . As you like, but you must bring me my tights this minute; I shall be dressing directly. I want my maid, I cannot send her."

"What is to be done then? . . . I really do not know . . ." the Prince muttered, looking around him helplessly.

"There is nothing to know," Petrova shrugged her shoulders. "Tell them to bring round your carriage, and go yourself; the tights are lying in the bedroom. . . ."

The Prince was quite disconcerted, and began explaining something hesitatingly to Petrova, but she knit her brows into an angry frown and raised her voice:

"I will be late for my call. Cannot you go for me when you are requested? One might think I am asking for some enormous service."

"Very well, very well, my angel, I will go, only please do not be angry. . . . I am just going."

Prince Alexei kissed Petrova's hand and left the scene with rapid steps. He met no one on his way out; the ballet-dancers present at the incident had warned the administration of the theatre in time that "Mashenka Petrova was being rude to the Prince," and everyone had tried to keep away, not wanting to add to the confusion of the disconcerted nobleman. In half an hour's time Prince Alexei handed the tights himself into Petrova's dressing-room.

On hearing this story from Olga Onisimovna the Princess rose rapidly from her armchair, and, forgetting her presence, clenched her hands with an expression of anger and despair.

"What a scandal! . . . What a humiliation! . . ." she whispered. "And after that, did he leave the theatre or did he remain there?" she asked Onisimovna.

"He remained until the end of the ballet in his box; then he conducted her home in his carriage, and from there they went together to supper at Borel's."

"You may go now, Olga Onisimovna, you may go. . . . I have heard enough for to-day. . . ."

The Princess was greatly agitated, and her face looked more ugly than usual. After her usual prayer she ordered her lunch to be served in her own apartments, not wishing to see the Prince.

Having completed all that she had to do and received all the reports on the household and estates, the Princess threw a black shawl on her head and was proceeding to visit Father Fedor in the wing of the house. While she was approaching the stairs, a footman announced with a respectful solemnity the arrival of her distant kinswoman,

a high-born lady and well-known benefactress, whom everybody adored and held in great reverence. Princess Anna Valerianovna, still holding the shawl at her chin with her hand, went to the *salon*, into which a tall pale woman, in a black silk dress trimmed with exquisite lace, was entering from an opposite door. The new-comer was no longer young, and her beautiful blue eyes had an unusually mild and kindly expression. Her movements were simple and at the same time full of a stately majesty. All who became nearer acquainted with this pensive face experienced a desire to gaze without end into the clear and sad blue eyes, which seemed to conceal a mystery in their depths. Even those who were obliged to hide from their owner the sad reality, and to deceive her for her own peace of mind, were unable to withstand the pure charm of her look, and spoke the truth. . .

"I fear I come at an inconvenient moment, my dear?" she said kindly to the Princess, who was coming to meet her with her heavy uncouth steps. "You were just going out?"

"Yes, dear Marie, I am on my way to visit the little daughter of poor Father Fedor; the child is ill, and as she has no mother I try to take the place of one," answered the Princess.

"Then I will withdraw, *chère amie*. I do not wish to hinder *ni les bons ni les mauvais engouements. Au revoir.*"

The visitor extended her hand graciously to the Princess and slowly moved away. Although there had been no one in the drawing-room except the visitor and the Princess, nevertheless in an hour's time the whole house had heard of the tactless behaviour of the Princess, who had not wished to put off her visit to Father Fedor for half an hour, but had gone to meet her eminent visitor with a shawl on her head. In the evening Prince Alexei heard of this from his son. Prince Serguei blamed his mother in sharp terms, complaining that she was neglecting not only the ties of kinship, but such as were most necessary to him in his career, and he asked his father to give his attention to the episode of the day. The Prince listened to his son with

weariness, advised him to be more lenient towards his mother, and as soon as the young man left the room he called to Tikhon to change his dress and went off to the small private house, where he spent all his free evenings.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the princely mansion a simple meal of tea and bread and butter was being served in a small drawing-room. Father Fedor, reassured as to his daughter's health, sat in an armchair, and stroking with his hand his flowing beard, or the curls of hair which fell on his shoulders, was examining sundry estimate sheets.

"Leave those papers, Father Fedor. I am so nervous to-day, I see no outlet for myself; I am so perplexed with thoughts, I feel as if I were in a labyrinth."

Father Fedor laid the sheets of paper on a neighbouring chair with great deliberation, and glanced at the Princess interrogatively.

"I am so weary, so weary, Father Fedor; I am tired of life and my struggles."

"What have you got to struggle against, dear Princess? I do not see reason for struggle in your life."

"Do not say so, Father Fedor. You always say the same, because you cannot understand that, living in this house, I cannot separate myself from his life, with which I am bound by my whole past life. . . . Every day brings new insults to our name."

The Princess moved the milk-pot from one place to another in irritation.

"What do they want from me?" she continued, becoming more and more excited. "I have not only retired from the Court and all worldly relations, I have become almost a hermit. . . . And still this is not enough! They wish to hunt me to death."

The last words were pronounced by the Princess in an unnaturally high pitched voice.

"However, you are not forgotten, dear Princess; I hear that our gracious benefactress has called on you. . . ."

"I do not want their attentions," interrupted the Princess sharply; "our family is not in favour, we are being ignored, and I do not need gracious visits. . . ."

Father Fedor laid his large muscular hand on that of the Princess.

"Enough, good mother! What is the use of agitating yourself? That is all done with and past. They turned away, you have taken yourself from their path, and, I thought, have long ago given up pride. . . ."

"It is not that, Father Fedor. It was only by the way. . . ."

"Then what is the matter? Share it with me; ease your heart."

"Again Prince Alexei has made a public display of his weakness! That shameless hussy is trampling our princely dignity into the mud, bringing shame on the whole family."

The Princess related to Father Fedor the story that she had heard that morning from Olga Onisimovna.

"A pest, a real pest, that Petrova!" said Father Fedor with a smile; "but still I do not see why you, Princess, take to heart in such manner all these worldly sins and nonsense. He is no husband of yours any longer; all know it; all know that you are living a separate godly life, and no actions of his can or should concern you. Yes, it is difficult to be humble for people who have been born in the purple," sighed Father Fedor, sipping his tea slowly.

"Have I not become humble?" exclaimed the Princess with sincere bitterness, and her ugly face was convulsed with the effort to restrain her sobs.

"No, you have not humbled yourself, dear Princess," repeated Father Fedor with insistence. "In humility and submission to God's will peace is obtained, but your soul is like a craft on a stormy sea—tossing about a prey to the waves, which may engulf it."

"What must I do then, Father Fedor?" said the Princess with a groan, covering her face with her hands.

"You must follow my advice as your friend and my command as your Father-confessor. Cease all inquiries into the life of the Prince; he has become a stranger to you, and it is not for you to concern yourself with his love affairs. Live your own life, Princess, love it, go deeper into it, and in leaving the world you will also leave its

sorrows. . . . You have given your soul to One, but you are unable to tear your heart from the other, who has forsaken you," said Father Fedor in a low voice, as if talking to himself.

"Do not reproach me, I am suffering so much," said the Princess, lower still.

"I am not reproaching you, my dear Princess. I am sure that you will conquer yourself and live for God alone. And I will remain until the grave your faithful friend, counsellor and comforter."

"I trust you, Father Fedor—I trust you completely."

A short silence ensued. The Princess sighed and wiped her tears. Father Fedor, throwing back the broad sleeves of his cassock with an accustomed gesture, drank his tea and ate bread and butter with a good appetite.

"Have you looked over the estimates attentively?" asked the Princess.

"I have looked over all of them. Well, in my opinion, with God's blessing, we may proceed to the construction, good mother Princess. It is a good work, and worthy of your name. Your monastery will blossom out of the ground like a gorgeous flower; you will give a shelter within its walls to such as have been tried by fate, and in time you will love your work and give your whole soul to it."

"Yes, I know; it will be so, I feel that it will be so."

"If you feel so, then do not hesitate any longer; with God's blessing we will proceed to work in the spring."

"Yes, I will decide, Father Fedor; the construction must begin as soon as possible. Send the architect to me one of these days; tell him that I will give him my final instructions and appoint the day for laying the foundation stone."

The Princess's colloquy with Father Fedor continued till late in the night. When he left her she entered her oratory with a comforted heart.

XI

In a small private house on the quay lived one of the prettiest women of the time—Nellie Ivanovna Garina. Her real name was Matriona, but since ten years ago, when the rich and dashing Life Guardsman Garin carried her off from her husband, a lackey at the Court, and, madly in love with her, made her not his mistress, but his wife, a deep gulf had been dug between the former pert, pretty Matresha, who used to flaunt her cheap finery at the music in Pavlovsk, and the present fascinating, daring beauty, Nellie. Not only her husband, but many of the golden youth of the capital, were at her feet. Garin, a good-natured bon-vivant, left his wife completely free to do whatever she liked, trusting her that she would be true to him. The dark, black-eyed beauty, lording it over her numerous brilliant cavaliers, made no attempt to shine in the drawing-rooms of the ladies of the society; she seldom visited them, and rarely invited them to her house, so that her drawing-rooms were mostly filled with men, towards whom she was either bold or kind, or even cynically brusque. Everything was forgiven on account of her beauty.

Near midnight Michail Gourakin drove up to Nellie Ivanovna's lit-up entrance gates. The porter met the late visitor with a friendly greeting.

"You have deigned to come rather late."

"Yes, brother, I am rather late. Tell my coachman to drive to Odintzoff's; let him say there that I am at Nellie Ivánovna's, and that all are to come over here."

"Very well, sir, I'll tell him this minute. Walk up, please."

Michail ran up the stairs two steps at a time.

"Wretched bad boy, I don't want to know you," said the hostess on perceiving Gourakin, tapping him on the

shoulder with her fan. "You promised to come at ten, and now you appear after eleven."

"On my word, I could not come earlier: I was detained, impossible to tear myself away."

"Why do you tell fibs, my dear? You were simply drinking somewhere."

"Nellie Ivanovna, *croyez moi sur l'honneur*—I was not drinking."

"Then you have been with a woman."

"Not with a woman, but with women," remarked Matlin, a slim young Life Hussar, half reclining on a sofa with his uniform unbuttoned, and making notes in his note-book, an occupation which did not prevent him from exchanging jokes and words with his animated comrades.

"*Mon vieux*, you are mistaken: I have been with a woman; Nellie Ivanovna guessed rightly."

"*Honi soit qui mal y pense.* When an engaged man says that he has been with a woman, there must be no place for indiscreet guesses," said handsome Duke Vladimir, a dashing aide-de-camp of the Emperor, well known in Petrograd for his beauty, and charming and sunny temper.

"Your Highness, *j'en suis désolé, mais . . .*"

"Bravo! . . . *Je suis toujours pour les 'mais' . . .*" exclaimed the Duke merrily, pouring out champagne from a bottle which stood near in a silver barrel filled with ice. Near it stood bottles of Lafitte, sherry and cognac.

"Gourakin, pour me out some wine."

". . . And me. . . ."

"And me. . . ."

The gay, slightly excited voices rang out on all sides.

"You seem to have forgotten me, Duke. Give me some wine too," said the hostess, with a flash of her lovely eyes.

"With pleasure."

The Duke, in unbuttoned uniform, like all the rest of the company, handed a glass of champagne to Nellie Ivanovna, and, bending low to her ear, whispered into it:

"Drink, *ma déesse*, but under the condition that in respect to me *il n'y aît pas de 'mais.'*"

"That depends on you . . ." answered Nellie Ivanovna

in Russian, with an exquisite smile, and mischievously screwing up her eyes.

Notwithstanding all her efforts, she was not an expert at the French language; being sufficiently clever, she avoided speaking it, but on the other hand she knew how to introduce such unusual expressions in her Russian speech, which could only be pardoned to such a beauty as she knew herself to be.

"Michelinka, come here," she called to Gourakin, leading him aside. "Well, how is it? You have made it up with your Nathalie?"

"Yes, I have made it up again."

"But, Mishenka, you are a fool, a born fool. Why have you made it up? She is an Othello in petticoats, a demon of jealousy, not a woman. What makes you insist on putting your neck into a noose? Remain with her as a lover; you will be sure to leave her in a year as it is. If she could make such a scandal now, what will it be in future?"

"If you are my friend, I ask you not to speak to me any more about all this. You know the Russian proverb: 'After cutting off the head, it is no use crying over the hair.'"

"What nonsense! I will not think of being silent! It is just the duty of a friend to tell the truth to such crazy boys as you. Tell me now, or else we will quarrel: did she ask your pardon for the box on the ears?"

"She never thought of doing so."

"What does she imagine? That you are my lover?"

"She fancies that I am in love with you. . . ."

"And are marrying her, after having made her a baby. . . . One must be either crazy or a fool."

"Quite unnecessary; it may be that I am in love with you. . . . Who knows? . . ." Michail laughed.

"I am speaking seriously, and you are talking nonsense. . . . Get you gone, if so. Wait a bit, though; would you like me to go to her to-morrow and tell her that her fiancé, *le beau* Michail Gourakin, had just declared his love to me? Would you like it, dear boy? Perhaps, besides a dozen

boxes on the ear, which she will give you with her own aristocratic little hand, the marriage will be definitely put off, which is just what I want."

"I see, Nellie Ivanovna, that I must complain of you to the Duke," laughed Michail.

"Complain of whom?" called out the Duke, interrupting his conversation with the gay and good-natured Prince Vassilkoff, also a Life Hussar.

"Of me, for wanting to frustrate his idiotic marriage with Volynskaia."

"No, my goddess, in this business I cannot move, or else my wife will bring down all our house; she has set her heart on seeing this youth play the part of a husband, and besides himself there is no one who can undo the business."

Meanwhile from the other end of the room a general outburst of laughter was heard. The Hussar Matlin was reading some verses that he had inscribed in his note-book. From the neighbouring room, the library, some Life Hussars, comrades of the host, and the latter himself, had come out, and were listening to Matlin's reading. Each verse was greeted by bursts of laughter and applause. Matlin was made to repeat some of his witty verses, that had already been spoken of in the drawing-rooms. His health was drunk, glasses were raised in his honour, some of the wittiest lines were passing from mouth to mouth. At the same time a caricature was being handed round, drawn by a well-known caricaturist of the regiment, and representing a duel between two Hussars for the right to the heart of the beautiful Nellie. The picture raised a new outburst of merriment. A small, stout Life Hussar, one of the Eastern Princes, with a large hooked nose, was sitting astride on a big gun, and with his hand behind his back was trying to set fire to the fuse aiming at his rival, an extremely tall thin Hussar, who was holding a gun in his hand and also aiming its mouth at his comrade. The resemblance was so great and the comic element so striking that it was impossible not to laugh.

Nellie Ivanovna laughed more than all the rest. She threw herself on a low armchair, leaning her head back and

laughing unrestrainedly, showing two rows of pearl-white, even teeth. Her hair, black as a raven's wing, was slightly ruffled, and a wavy lock had escaped from the high coiffure shading the pretty flushed face.

"Darling Baron, come here, I will give you a kiss for the picture," she called to the author of the caricature. "Do give it me for my album; it will be the best I've got."

Meantime Michail Gourakin, boisterously gay, as usual giving himself up to the pleasures of the moment, and forgetting in his merriment all the worries of life, went up to the piano, and with great expression began to sing the fashionable romance of the time, in his soft, passionate baritone. Nellie Ivanovna continued to recline in the same armchair, one foot crossed on the other. From under the smart hem of her gown a pair of small slender feet were seen which in nowise betrayed the humble origin of their owner. Prince Vassilkoff lay on a rug of white bear's fur opposite the chair. In one hand he held a bottle of cognac, in the other a wine-glass, which he kept lifting to his lips, slowly sipping at the cognac which it contained. When Michail, turning his laughing eyes towards Nellie Ivanovna, sang the following words of the romance: "And at your baby feet I lay the whole passion of my soul . . ." Prince Vassilkoff rapidly put down the glass and kissed the gracefully extended feet of the beautiful hostess, one after the other.

"Ah, what a naughty boy," she cried with a laugh.

"Vassilkoff, I will wring your neck!" exclaimed the Duke jestingly from the other end of the room, and threatened him with his fist.

"Do not trouble, Your Highness," replied Vassilkoff phlegmatically. "Our goddess has already taken care to turn my head."

By an involuntary or intentional movement Nellie Ivanovna's foot caught in the bear's fur, and the white satin slipper dropped from it. At the same moment Vassilkoff picked it up and put it in his pocket.

"Give it back directly. That's mean!" laughed Nellie Ivanovna.

With one spring the Duke was upon Vassilkoff, and a struggle ensued.

"Ha-ha-ha! . . . Do leave off. . . . I cannot laugh any more," Nellie Ivanovna exclaimed, shrieking with laughter. "Do stop; I will have a stitch in my side. . . ."

"As you will. I return you your slipper, O gracious goddess, but on condition that it be filled with champagne, and that each one of us be allowed to drink from it."

Prince Vassilkoff's words were universally acclaimed, and in a moment the Duke, holding the slipper by the high heel, filled it with the sparkling wine amid general applause.

It was quite late when the merry company of young officers took their cloaks from the sleepy porter, and laughing and talking, and making appointments for the next day, left the hospitable house, where the time passed so gaily and the wine flowed so freely.

"Listen, Duke," said Nellie Ivanovna in a low voice, detaining him at the moment of departure. "I implore you, do something to prevent this idiotic marriage of poor Michail with Volynskaia. You must admit that it is totally unsuitable. I am ready to wager anything you like that he was drawn into this story, and that he is marrying because he is only a boy, and does not know how to extricate himself. You have heard of the box on the ear that she gave him in the carriage when she heard that he was often at my house, and decided that he must be my lover? . . ."

"Listen, *ma belle*. I know all this, as well as I know that Gourakin is doing a stupid thing, but permission has already been granted from high quarters, and Volynsky has consented to the divorce *à contre cœur*. This has all become public property, and it is too late to prevent anything. Therefore let us leave them to their follies, and as to ourselves, let us drink and be merry."

The Duke kissed both of Nellie Ivanovna's hands several times, and, taking up his cap, departed.

XII

After Marie Gourakin had involuntarily become the intermediary between her nephew and Volynskaia through her intervention in their relations, Michail used frequently to come to her room, and there, with the doors closed fast, he would frankly share with her all the thoughts that were troubling him. Little by little he confessed to his aunt that the forthcoming marriage was oppressing him, as he had become convinced that the stormy, jealous and capricious nature of Volynskaia could only be managed by her authoritative and haughty husband, but that for him life with such a wife would be torture. He acknowledged that there was no retreat for him, especially as Volynskaia was hurrying on the marriage in view of her position, which was becoming impossible to hide. After the wedding they were to leave for Moscow, where Michail had been offered a post with the Governor-General, and where Volynskaia's uncle, the millionaire Dounaiský, was offering his only niece and heiress an apartment of six rooms in the second story of his large gloomy mansion. The idea of living in Moscow oppressed Michail, as he had grown so accustomed to the brilliant surroundings of his present happy, careless life; he was also oppressed by the prospect of having to live with old Dounaisky, who was known for his disagreeable character, of being dependent on him, of having to try to please him so as not to anger him and thus lose his enormous fortune. Michail's passionate, open-hearted nature tried to find oblivion in frequent talks with his aunt, and oftener still in mad revels with his comrades. Old Mme. Gourakina buried in her heart her deep sorrow over the fate of her grandson, and after the departure of her son did not resume the subject again with Michail. All the details of his story and conduct she now heard from Baroness Kern,

who was very intimate with the Duchess; the dangerous game with which she did not sympathize had been played under her eyes. She lived a worldly life and knew all that was going on in society.

"What a pity!—what a pity that your Michail got himself involved in this fatal story!" she used to say now to Mme. Gourakina. "Little Princess Barbe is madly in love with him. This would be in all respects a very good *parti.* The old Prince is *un gros bonnet,* but he has very great influence at Court. Barbe is adorable. They say she is pining for love of him."

Listening to the Baroness's words old Mme. Gourakina used to shake her head hopelessly, and the nervous *tic* played at the corner of her mouth. Her aspect was quite as commanding, but it happened now that she was late for her morning coffee, complaining of sleeplessness, that she frequently did not hear questions addressed to herself, and often, in the midst of the evening readings, she would interrupt her daughter with such questions as these:

"Do not you know, Marie, why Michail has not been here for two days?" or, "When you will be speaking to Michail, try to find out whether he says his prayers. It is so easy to forget God in the midst of a riotous life."

Marie used to gaze at her mother's face by stealth, and her heart ached with pain; a shadow of hidden suffering lay on the austere, impassive features. Marie kept silence. Her mother did not remark that Marie had reached the age when she could be her friend, she did not notice that Marie knew life, and was silent only because she waited for the first word to come from her mother. Thus both suffered in silence and separately, although their suffering was a common one and equally filled their hearts. Mme. Gourakina had forbidden her grandson to mention Volynskaia's name in her house, and she would not hear anything of the wedding; she told her daughter that she was sure that the latter would during her lifetime have no relations with the woman who had insulted their family by entering it through misconduct. Marie, respecting her mother's will, resolved to submit to it, and sorrowfully but firmly told her nephew

that she would not be present at his wedding, as she did not want to grieve her mother. Michail did not insist. He knew that he was acting contrary to the pure traditions which for centuries had been rooted in their family. Notwithstanding his youth, he, the last representative of this ancient race, was proud of his name, and now he was feeling deeply his sin against his father and grandmother. But apart from his own will, without any reasoning, and acknowledging that the fault had been only on his own side, he felt an irritation towards Volynskaia, which increased daily. He had cooled towards her because for her sake he was setting at naught the traditions of his race, because he had quarrelled with his father and was breaking up his life. By stormy outbursts of unfounded jealousy she, not yet his wife, was already annoying and oppressing him; he sought oblivion in wine and among women, with whom in the first days of his love he had decided to have nothing to do.

Michail's leaving the regiment was celebrated by a grand fête at the officers' club, at which all his comrades were present. The second Godspeed gathering was held at Dussaux's; all who desired to participate in it were allowed to come. There were over a hundred and fifty persons. So much wine was drunk, so much china broken, and so many young men participated in the revels that next day some details of the feast were related in the *salons*, in which the name of Michail Gourakin figured in different versions, which were repeated with discreet laughs in shocked whispers.

The wedding day was fixed unexpectedly soon. The ceremony took place in a private church belonging to an old aunt of Nathalie Volynskaia. Many members of the highest society attended it, as the Duchess had declared beforehand her intention of being present. The same evening the newly married pair left for Moscow, Michail's new post, and the *beau-monde* of St. Petersburg, seeing that the scandal was exhausted, ceased to interest itself in their fate for a time.

PART TWO

I

It was seven o'clock in the morning. The wintry dawn, cold and foggy, was just beginning to show behind the huge windows of a large and gloomy study, heavily and sparsely set with cumbrous, ancient furniture. The wall opposite the door was occupied by tall bookcases reaching almost up to the ceiling. Behind the glass doors the backs of time-worn volumes, small and large, were seen. A portable four-step ladder stood near a bookcase with open door. An enormous sofa covered with dark green leather and four easy chairs round an oval table were placed facing the book-shelves. A massive desk, with a folding board and a number of small drawers inside, stood in the corner. Near the window was a large writing-table, completely covered with account-books, papers, medicine-boxes, bottles, bundles of unexamined accounts, and uncut newspapers and journals. Two candles under a green shade were placed near an open book, which had been taken from its shelf an hour ago. It was "Histoire de la Révolution Française."

An old man's hand, yellow as parchment, was slowly turning over the pages one by one. In a grey dressing-gown with blue facings and a girdle of the same colour with large tassels, Ilarion Zakharovitch Dounaisky had been sitting at this table since six o'clock. His wrinkled, earth-coloured face was ugly and harsh-looking. The blunt chin and cheeks were covered with a growth of grey prickly hairs which Dounaisky shaved twice a month. The drawn down corners of the mouth and two deep wrinkles descending from the nose gave a bilious and disdainful look

to his face. Two pairs of spectacles in tortoise-shell setting were placed on his short snub nose. Short grey hairs curled round the bald place on his head.

When the clock on the table struck seven, Dounaisky placed a bookmarker, made of an old faded Georgian ribbon, in the book, closed it, and rang a small bronze bell, standing near. The door opened noiselessly, and a servant, stepping softly on his felt soles, entered the room. Dounaisky silently pointed with his finger at the book. The servant replaced it in the bookcase, closed the latter, and laid the keys back on the table.

"Moissei Borisovitch," said the old man abruptly; the servant retired.

Moissei Borisovitch, who had been waiting in the antechamber, entered directly after. He was lower than middle height, rather stout, with a red moustache cut short over his lip, red spare hair smoothly combed across his head, to mask the bald place on the crown, a small pointed beard, little crafty eyes, peering with a sharp look behind his round spectacles, which had a tortoise-shell setting. He was dressed in a worn-out and badly fitting frock-coat, and held a shabby portfolio under his arm.

The old man gave a slight nod in acknowledgment of Moissei Borisovitch's respectful bow.

"The petitions," growled he, without raising his eyes, moving the inkstand near to him and taking up a pen.

Moissei Borisovitch handed him several petitions for relief. The old gentleman ran his eyes over the marginal notes in red ink made by Moissei Borisovitch; on some of the applications he wrote, "To be given," on others he scribbled angrily, "To the devil," and flung them towards Moissei Borisovitch.

"The stud," he demanded shortly, having completed the examination of the petitions.

After looking through the accounts, asking a few questions which resembled growls, he said:

"The estate."

Having completed his inspection of the various papers, he took off both pairs of spectacles, folded his dressing-

gown closer around him, leaned back in his chair, and sat silent, frowning and drumming with his fingers on the edge of the table. Moissei Borisovitch put the papers back into the portfolio and also remained silent, awaiting the usual questions, which generally followed in the same order. Dounaisky seemed to have forgotten that he was not alone, but Moissei Borisovitch knew that, in the old man's opinion, it would be the greatest impertinence to remind him of his presence, and therefore he waited patiently, trying to think of the best way in which to propose an affair whose success would be highly advantageous to his own pocket.

"Your report," the old man interrupted his musings sharply, and for the first time glanced straight at the steward.

"In the second story the fireplaces are smoking, Your Excellency; the stove-setter must be called to repair them."

"Nonsense! Lies!"

"Yesterday evening Nathalie Georgievna's footman came to me twice about it. I ordered the chimneys to be cleaned; to-day the fires were lighted, and it was the same thing again."

"Have them cleaned again. I tell you it is not true. What else?"

"The police officer called; they want the snow to be carried away and the pavement scraped clean. Efim cannot do this alone—so much snow has fallen. Will you permit a day-labourer to be engaged?"

"Extra expense. Send some one of the men from the kitchen, and if the police officer calls again, kick him out and tell him that such were my orders. Go on."

"Will you please give an order that about four poods of petroleum be added for the second story? It is very badly lighted, especially as they often have company. Very much is burnt."

The old man sniffed, and snorted crossly:

"To the devil with their company! . . . Increase the supply, if necessary, but order the menials to be careful of it."

"Has the Englishwoman gone?" asked the old gentleman after a moment's silence.

"She is going to stay. Michail Vladimirovitch has increased her salary by ten roubles."

"He is doing nonsense. Spoiling her. He might have a cheaper and better one."

"He says the little one has grown used to her and would miss her."

"I say he is spoiling the woman. I see the expenses are increasing, but the funds are the same . . ." said the old man with a wry smile. "Carelessness and foolishness."

The old man ceased his questioning and again resumed his drumming on the table. During the several minutes of silence Moissei Borisovitch decided to lay aside for that day the question of the sale of the troika of black horses to a friend of his. The old man was evidently in a bad temper, which he showed by the long pauses in his talk and the drumming of his fingers on the table.

"Is he making debts? . . . Have you heard anything?" he suddenly asked the steward, fixing on him a sharp and searching look.

"I have not heard. . . . I have not noticed. . . ."

For one moment the crafty eyes of Moissei Borisovitch flickered slightly, but soon resumed their calm and indifferent expression.

"What are your orders, Your Excellency, in regard to the sale of the pair of black horses of our stud to Michail Vladimirovitch?"

"What are you inventing there? Speak clearly."

Dounaisky knit his brows and moved in his chair.

"He proposes to pay eight hundred roubles for the black horses to be used for the carriage: he says it is a shame to go to balls and theatres in cabs."

"Where is the money to come from to pay for the horses?" asked Dounaisky with a sarcastic smile.

"I do not know. He asked me to report to you, and is expecting your answer."

"I will think about it. I'll tell him myself," snapped the

old man. "Troubling me with such nonsense! You may go."

Dounaisky dismissed the steward with a nod and rang the bell.

"My dress," he ordered, rising from his chair.

He blew out the candles, and going up to the sofa he threw off his dressing-gown. In the dim light of the winter morning his features looked paler and more earth-coloured. In his shirt sleeves he seemed a small, thin and pitiable old man with a cross and disagreeable expression. Groaning and grumbling, he donned the dress that was brought him; in the uniform with spurs he looked younger and taller. Without a glance to the right or left he passed through the cold and comfortless rooms which for economy's sake were heated only every other day, descended into the hall, and without answering the salute of the footman on duty at the front door, put on his warm cloak, wrapped it around him, pulled his cap well over his eyes, and sallied forth for a walk.

After his report Moissei Borisovitch went upstairs. There the servant told him that the master had come home at six in the morning and had given orders that he was not to be disturbed before eleven.

"Tell the master that I must see him on business, and will await his pleasure to come to him. What about the stoves—do they smoke?"

"Yesterday they smoked, but to-day it is all right. We lit them, and they are burning brightly."

"How so!" the steward said with a frown, "and I reported that they are smoking."

"Well, what matter! They are not smoking to-day, but to-morrow we will make them smoke, and you will be right," laughed the young footman. "The stoves are really bad—you may put in any amount of wood, they give no real warmth. We shall not manage without the stove-setter."

"All right, I'll see about it myself. You say he came back late? From where?"

"From where? From . . ."

The footman made an eloquent gesture showing a man drinking, and his lips parted in a merry grin.

"So, so . . ." said Moissei Borisovitch thoughtfully. "He is often on the spree."

"And why should he not be? Such a handsome man, such a fine fellow, and so lively a nature. Those are the people who ought to lead a merry life. Should he take an example from your old owl?"

"So . . . so . . ." said Moissei Borisovitch again. "And how is the mistress?"

The footman made an impatient movement.

"She is just as usual—one day crying and raging, the other hanging herself on his neck. A crazy woman! Last night she sat up for the master till four o'clock. She was in the drawing-room on the sofa, reading a book and burning the candles, and he not coming and not coming. After four she called me, her face quite green and pale. 'You may go to bed, Timothy,' she said, 'and leave the door open. The master will soon be in now.' Well, I thought, you bet, oh, she will give it him hot to-day. Last night she probably did not dare to; he dislikes to be worried when he is in his cups. He'll make such a row as to wake the whole house."

After a little further talk with the footman Moissei Borisovitch went away to wait till Michail should send for him.

II

It was quite late in the morning when Michail awoke and pressed the button of the electric bell; then, groping with his hand in the darkness caused by the drawn blinds and curtains on the table near him, found the cigarettes and matches and began to smoke. He bent his ear, and guessed by the quiet which reigned in the adjoining room that Nathalie had quitted her bedroom. While the servant was preparing his bath in the dressing-room and bringing his clothes, Michail lay on his back, smoking and considering ways and means to avoid the scene which his wife was in the habit of making when he returned home late. He thought with pleasure of the agreeable evening that he had passed at the Governor-General's the day before. At first they had asked him to play cards, but a new partner arrived, and the ladies had insisted that he should join them. He was in good spirits; he sang some tsigane songs, and felt how his presence and voice electrified the atmosphere of the room, in which there were several very pretty women. Without the shadow of coxcombry and without effort on his part Michail won women's hearts. He knew it, and with gay and lighthearted good nature he gave himself up to this power of his. With a feeling of wonder very soon he ascertained in practice that beautiful and, as it seemed to him, inaccessible women easily and rapidly ceded to his wishes. . . . Since his two years of married life Michail felt a great difference in himself. His love for Nathalie had quite cooled, but he tried not to think of this and to hide it from her. Notwithstanding the loss of his love, he would have managed to bear the burden of married life if Nathalie would not torment him with outbursts of jealousy. His healthy and strong constitution, animated spirits, and love for life created around him a pleasant atmosphere in

which it seemed easy to live both for himself and for those who surrounded him. All involuntarily submitted to the law of an easy and pleasant life, except Nathalie, who made her own life a burden, poisoned the light, pleasure-loving nature of her husband, and estranged him more and more.

After the evening at the Governor-General's a whole company had assembled at a friend of Michail's, where they played cards and tasted some wine that had just been received from abroad. The company was very interesting, and all were very merry. To-day promised to be good also; his friend Tchagin had arrived from Petersburg and he had asked him to dinner. Then there was the question regarding the purchase of the horses. All was good and pleasant . . . and like a dark cloud loomed the inevitable talk with Nathalie.

Gourakin frowned, and decided to avoid his wife until dinner-time, or rather until Tchagin's arrival, and he hoped that after this all would pass over quietly. He suddenly remembered the conversation which he had had last night at the tea-table with one of the prettiest women of their circle of friends. An involuntary glad smile passed over Michail's lips. This woman interested him, and after yesterday evening he understood that he was not indifferent to her. . . . Michail, still smiling, stretched his young, muscular, flexible body, and with one bound jumped out of bed and put on his dressing-gown.

In his dressing-room a bath awaited him, which he thought of with the same pleasure that he felt towards everything that went to make up the sum of his pleasant and healthy life.

III

NATHALIE GOURAKINA, with a pale face after her sleepless night, as handsome and slim as she was two years ago, but with an irritated expression on her face, entered the dining-room, where lunch was already served and two-year-old Mimi, perched on her high chair beside the thin English nursery-governess, was impatiently striving to get at her eggs and porridge.

"You must wait for papa and mamma," the governess was repeating, restraining the little hands; Mimi struggled to free them, and scratched the large hand which prevented her from snatching an egg.

"Master has sent word that he will be here directly, and asks not to wait for him," announced the same footman who had spoken to Moissei Borisovitch in the morning.

Nathalie took her place, the governess sat down after her. An old and respectable-looking nurse in a starched cap, brown dress and white apron, appeared, and, tying a table napkin under the chin of the little girl, began to feed her, talking to her the while in a low voice.

"Has Boby had his milk?" asked Nathalie of the governess.

"When we went to lunch the nurse was not there yet," answered the latter in English.

"Boby is lunching now," said the nurse.

Nathalie began to eat in silence and unwillingly, glancing frequently towards the door leading into the drawing-room. When her husband's mellow laugh was heard, something seemed to quiver in her face.

"Is there somebody with the master?" she asked the footman.

"Moissei Borisovitch came half an hour ago."

The door between the study and the drawing-room was heard to open, and the loud pleasant voice of Michail was heard saying:

"Then I will come down to the stables after lunch, and from there I will go to my uncle's. Do not tell him anything about the carriage or the sleigh yet, Moissei Borisovitch. We will first conclude the business with the horses, or else the old man may refuse to give either the one or the other. Come to me to-morrow morning, or, better still, to-day after dinner."

"My respects," the voice of the steward answered.

Michail entered the dining-room.

He wore the uniform of an aide-de-camp. He had lost his look of extreme youth during these last two years, but he had grown handsomer, and his tall stately figure was more dignified. His cheery, good-humoured glance sought little Mimi.

With a friendly greeting to the governess and the nurse, he kissed his wife's hand in passing by her chair, and going up to the little girl he put two fingers down the back of the neck and commenced to tickle her. The child threw her head back, screwed up her eyes, and laughed merrily, kicking her half bare little legs.

"You are not letting her eat," remarked Nathalie in a disagreeable voice.

She had hardly touched her husband's forehead with her lips while he was kissing her hand.

Michail took no notice of his wife's remark, lifted Mimi off her chair, tossed her up in the air, watching lovingly her little fat legs in their white socks and shoes dangling in the air, then pressed her to his heart, and kissing her several times, carefully put her down again.

"Is baby all right?"

"He is well and had a good sleep," answered the nurse staidly.

"You are going to call on uncle after lunch?" said Nathalie in French, so as not to be understood by the governess and servants.

"Yes, I am."

"Has he sent for you?"

"No, I am going without invitation."

"But . . . he will not receive you. Why should you disturb his habits and irritate the old man?"

"You know very well that I have not quarrelled with him once, and I will know how to be received kindly even if I go without being invited."

"I doubt it. Why do you want to see him?"

"To settle the question about the horses."

"Does he consent to give you them?"

"Not to give, but to sell them firstly, and secondly he says neither yes nor no. I know his manner; he will go on hesitating until spring. I shall have to bring him to the point. I am offering a good price. If you want money, you may ask Moissei Borisovitch to give you five hundred roubles," added Michail, not noticing, or pretending not to notice, his wife's bad humour.

"This person"—Nathalie indicated the governess with her eyes—"has again quarrelled with the maid about the hot water. I see that she will have to be dismissed; I told you it would not do to give in to her and allow her those extra ten roubles."

Michail frowned disdainfully:

"How can you find pleasure in interfering with the governess? What business is it of yours if she quarrels with the servants? I have increased her salary by ten roubles, and will gladly give her ten more if need be, because the child likes her, is glad to play with her, and she looks after the little one very well."

"But I hear complaints of her from my maid every day."

"Send the maid away."

"You are mad! I have had Fenia with me ten years."

"The child's welfare is dearer than any Fenia, and it will end in my dealing with Fenia myself for her tale-bearing. . . . Do leave off your cavilling and let the governess be."

"Evidently you have not slept well," said Nathalie with a wry smile.

"I! I slept perfectly, and am feeling excellently. Please

bear in mind that we have Tchagin and Rykhloff to dinner to-day."

"We are going to the Opera to-night—have you forgotten? Aline is dining here, and we are all going together."

"One thing does not hinder the other," answered Michail, pouring himself out a glass of claret and drinking it.

"You know very well that I hate to have visitors to dinner the evening we are going to the theatre . . . especially your Rykhloff. I cannot bear him. . . ."

Nathalie shrugged her shoulders with growing irritation.

"And I cannot bear your Aline. However, I am silent, and even go to theatres and balls in her company. Please do not spoil my good spirits, and spare me from your senseless caprices. It is so dull to see your discontented face day by day."

"If it is so, you have only yourself to blame. I cannot be gay if I have no peace."

Michail was silent. He had lit a cigar, and letting out the smoke and half closing his eyes, he was looking aside, as if remembering something pleasant, and appeared not to have heard his wife's last words.

The footman served the coffee and retired. Mimi ran up to her father. He stroked her head and took from his pocket a small cake of chocolate. The little one, receiving her favourite sweet, gave her hand to the governess, and they both left the room. Nathalie and Michail remained alone. Several minutes neither spoke—Michail without noticing the silence, Nathalie searching for an excuse to give vent to her irritation.

"What are they giving at the Opera to-night?" asked Gourakin.

"Ah, how do I know? . . ."

"But you sent for a box?"

"I did, and still I do not know. Is it not just the same?"

"It is not the same to me. I go to the Opera to listen

to something that pleases me, but not for the purpose of meeting my friends."

"I have heard that a hundred times; please do not repeat it. It is better to go to the Opera to meet your friends than to drink all the night," Nathalie said, suddenly giving way to her temper.

Michail glanced sideways at his wife, and again remained silent.

"I will never believe that you have been playing cards until six o'clock in the morning at the Governor-General's."

"But I think I did not tell you that it was so," remarked Michail calmly.

"Then why did you tell a lie, saying that you were going there?"

"Nathalie, cease," Michail said meaningly. "I do not know how to tell lies, and do not see any necessity for lying, as I have told you a hundred times that I do not admit of any control over my actions."

"Why don't you wish to tell me where you were last night?" Nathalie's eyes flashed angry fires.

"You have not asked me about it."

"Well, I am asking you now."

"You might have done so without disagreeable preambles."

Michail shook the ashes off his cigar and after a second's silence answered:

"From the Governor-General's we went to Zorin's to play cards, and sat there drinking wine for some time."

"With women, of course. . . . You could not manage to be without women. Why are you silent? It means that I have guessed rightly?"

"It means that I have enough of these foolish suppositions, and I put an end to our conversation."

Michail rose, and without looking at his wife went off to the nursery. Nathalie remained alone. She struggled to keep down the tears that were choking her.

"*En voilà un caractère infernal*," she whispered, and pushing away her chair with an angry movement, she went to her room.

Michail stayed a few minutes in the nursery and then proceeded to the stables. Some horses which were brought from the estate for sale stood in the boxes. Michail carefully examined a pair of magnificent black animals, patting them on their sleek sides. Then he ordered the carriage-house to be opened and also inspected very attentively a carriage and sleigh which stood amidst a great number of various vehicles.

"Since it was ordered in Vienna, no one has ever used it," said the groom, whisking the dust off an elegant closed carriage. "The sleigh was had out not more than five times. And now these things have been standing here for over two years. What are they waiting for? They would suit you nicely, Michail Vladimirovitch."

Michail left the coach-house, after having generously tipped the grooms and stablemen, and, accompanied by their deferential bows, directed his steps to the ground floor of the house, where his uncle lived.

Dounaisky was in his study, seated on the sofa before the oval table and occupied in laying the cards for patience, his customary occupation after lunch from two till three. At three p.m. he always opened the writing-desk in the corner of the room, and until five worked at his memoirs of the Sebastopol campaign. The old man had an excellent memory, and reproduced a precise copy of all that he had seen or heard of in relation to the unsuccessful epoch which had cost Russia streams of blood. While laying the cards the old man thought out and prepared the material to be recorded in the memoirs, and he would fly into an uncontrollable rage if disturbed during this hour.

There was a cautious knock at the door. The old man glanced towards it from under his shaggy brows and made no answer. The knock was repeated. Dounaisky flung the cards down on the table in a temper.

"What's wanted?" cried he.

The door opened softly and the grey head of his valet appeared:

"Michail Vladimirovitch on urgent business."

"Idiot! . . . How often I told you! . Get you

gone! ... If I want to see anyone, I call them myself. ..." The hoarse voice broke off angrily on a high note.

"Uncle, for God's sake receive me. I ask for only five minutes. I must see you most urgently."

Gourakin stood on the threshold, and, as if not noticing the angry face, continued with a broad, friendly smile:

"May I come in? Change your wrath to grace."

Without waiting for an answer he entered. The old man with knit brows continued to grumble under his breath. He shook hands unwillingly with Michail and began to collect and shuffle the cards lying about on the table without looking at his visitor. Michail picked up two of them which had fallen on the floor and laid them on the table.

"What's wanted?" asked Dounaisky abruptly, shuffling the cards with his bony fingers. A slight trembling of the hands in their red knitted wrist-warmers bore evidence to his inward rage.

"I want your advice, uncle, your wise counsel. I want it at once, as I have to give a definite answer by the evening. Nathalie knows nothing of this; I will do whatever you advise. . . . Last night I went to a card-party at the Governor-General's, and he told me confidentially that in Petersburg there will be a vacancy open with the Minister of War. If I consent, he will send a telegram to-day to obtain the post for me. I do not know; what am I to say?"

Dounaisky listened, frowning. If he had looked at Michail's face he might have doubted the sincerity of his words; the eyes of the young aide-de-camp twinkled with a mischievous laugh which he with difficulty restrained. This invention of his amused him. He knew beforehand what the old man would say, and foresaw that he would feel so much flattered by the deference to his advice that his wrath would be appeased and the object of the visit would be attained.

"Why should you hesitate! ... Catch hold of the agreeable possibility of returning to Petersburg, while society has not yet forgotten the scandal of your love story.

. . . And I suppose it will be so pleasant for you and Nathalie to meet Volynsky. . . . Financially, it looks very tempting also. . . . The Minister will probably give you a good apartment with heating and lighting, for your stately figure if for no other services. . . . A flattering proposition. . . . How can you not consent to it! . . ."

The old man spoke sarcastically and sharply. Notwithstanding his constant grumbling against his niece and her husband, both in their presence and in their absence, he was glad to know that he was not alone, since the upper story of his house was, at his urgent invitation, occupied by the family of Gourakin, whom he not only learnt to like, but even felt a certain weakness for, because he was the only person who did not fear his angry words or cross face. Always lively and happy-go-lucky, Michail carried with him into his uncle's old life a ray of sound masculine gaiety, in which women, wine, comradeship were united in one common knot. Not only did Michail not hide from the old man his partiality for the pleasures of life, but he spoke of the latter with such frankness that the other often listened graciously to his stories, although he always harshly blamed all excesses. Under his biting and caustic speeches the old man had wished to hide his disappointment at the thought that Michail would return to Petersburg. His house would again be empty, and he would be left to bear his complete solitude. He had ceased to go out in society, and rarely received anyone.

"I see, uncle, that you do not approve of the new appointment. . . ."

"How so I do not approve?" snapped the old man.

"I understand so, uncle. And therefore the matter is over and done with: I shall remain under your roof to torment you with my presence."

Michail smiled and looked at the old man with eyes in which there always shone an involuntary expression of kindness and friendliness.

He rose as if to go.

"How is Nathalie?" asked the old man, as if wishing to prolong the visit.

"Nathalie is in a bad temper," Michail answered with a smile.

"Is she unwell?"

"She's quite well, but she is angry with me because I came home rather late last night and a little *dans les vignes du Seigneur*. We sat late at Zorin's; a pleasant company had assembled for a game at lansquenet."

"What is there to be angry about? . . . Very foolish. . . . But you should drink less."

"But do I drink so much?" Michail laughed merrily. "Just enough *pour la noblesse qui oblige*. . . . I saw Count Palen yesterday, and he asked about you, uncle. . . . He spoke of your passion for horses formerly, your splendid racers and the prizes they won. . . ."

Dounaisky said nothing, but Michail could see by the scarcely perceptible smile that hovered round his lips that his slight ruse had pleased the old man and completely dissipated his ill-humour.

"And speaking of horses, Zorin is selling a pair of carriage horses. To be frank, yours are much better. If you would let me have them for eight hundred, I would rather take yours."

"Have you come into a fortune?"

"My aunt sent me a thousand roubles for Christmas," Michail explained.

"The price of the black horses is twelve hundred roubles. You may have them for eight hundred. Pay the money to Moissei Borisovitch."

"Allow me, uncle, to leave it here, on your table; I am afraid you might change your mind," Michail said jestingly, laying down the money that he had taken from Moissei Borisovitch an hour ago.

"I do not go back on my word."

"However, I am abusing your kindness, uncle, and have overstayed my five minutes. Thank you again for your advice."

"There is nothing to thank me for. Tell Nathalie from me that if she of her own free will exchanged her statesman-husband for a madcap and giddy boy then she must

learn to be lenient to his frolics. And you, amuse yourself, but within certain limits."

Gourakin went upstairs in the best of humours. The successful purchase of the horses and the prospect of dining with his friend, who had come from Petersburg, helped to mitigate the expectation of the inevitable quarrel with Nathalie which he had succeeded in avoiding during lunch.

IV

"NATHALIE, may I come in?"

"Certainly, dear Aline; I am very glad."

"Oh, how fine we are! . . . How wonderfully that peach colour suits you! . . . And what a perfect fit! . . How beautifully made."

"Why, Aline, this dress is three years old. I ordered it when we were in Paris. I would not hear of Russian dressmakers then, and even now, I must confess, I go to them against my will. But I have to economize and deny myself many things."

"Oh, Nathalie, you have such a quantity of Paris toilettes that you are always the best dressed and the most interesting and handsome woman present. You are spoilt, Nathalie, and you do not know what it means to wear the same dress at all your calls, and another at all the balls that you go to. You do not know this, and therefore you will not understand what I suffer each time when I have to go anywhere. . . ."

Aline's voice broke. She threw her silken sac on a small table and sank down on a sofa, while Nathalie, standing before a huge pier glass, was finishing her toilet. The peach-coloured silk dress was well suited to her bright gipsy type. A long string of large pearls encircled her neck in a double coil; diamonds flashed on her breast and fingers. Aline, a tall, very slim blonde, with flaxen-coloured hair, arranged in a pretty coiffure, large blue eyes and a transparent, delicate skin, was very interesting. In her narrow black silk dress, cut low in front and at the back, she seemed to have stepped down from a canvas painted by Gainsborough. Her figure and bearing were stylish and distinguished. Except a diamond brooch on her breast she wore no other ornament, and they would have been superfluous.

"Really, Aline, I repeat to you for the hundredth time that in your place I would never wear anything else but just this black dress of yours. For your figure, for your style, no other is necessary."

"Many thinks for such consolation. . . . It is all very well for you to talk, with the luxurious wardrobe that you have at your disposal. No, no, I am tired, I am weary of all, all. . . . I wanted to send you a note saying I would not go to the theatre, I am so disgusted with this dress, these shoes, this single diamond brooch. . . . O-o-oh! I am stifling, Nathalie! I would like to throw everything into the fire, and remain at home in my dressing-gown, undressed and unadorned, never seeing or hearing of anyone. . . ."

At the last words Aline jumped up from the sofa, and with a grimace of disgust shook her skirts and the silken underskirt trimmed with lace.

"Look at these shoes, Nathalie; they are *démodé*. . . . They make my feet look so ugly, but I must wear them, because I have not got ten roubles to buy new ones."

Aline turned aside and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Please do not think, Nathalie, that I am envying you. I must, I must speak of my worries to someone. . . . Always alone, always thinking of how to make both ends meet by the end of the month, alone with such degrading thoughts of how to manage. . . . You will agree that any nerves would be ruined."

"Do not cry, Aline. Believe me that I would often be glad to change places with you. Your privations are easier by far . . ."

"Nonsense! nonsense! I don't believe such talk. You are beautifully dressed, you wear pearls and diamonds, you go to balls, picnics and dinner-parties, you have a handsome husband, whom you worship. . . ."

"Yes, yes, that's just it, I worship him—and therein lies my suffering."

"Leave off, for God's sake!" Aline shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "You suffer because you are spoilt

by fate, because you are capricious. My husband was despotic, rough—he treated me like a little girl—but I had no money troubles, I was well dressed, I had diamonds, I knew myself to be pretty and attractive, and amidst pleasures and flirtations I used to forget the worries at home. No, Nathalie, such spoilt women as you and I, we cannot live without money, without all that makes a frame for a woman's beauty. Although my husband was a despot and harsh, I still felt his love, I knew he was fond of me as a woman."

"He never gave you cause for jealousy."

"Do you think so? He used to go to sup with ladies to spite me. . . . I was foolish: I used to cry. . . . Oh, now I am much wiser. Since I became a widow I have felt the prose of life, and I look at everything with other eyes. You have children, Nathalie, you have everything, everything, and you are tempting fate when you complain of it."

"I have everything except peace of mind—that is to say, except happiness. . . . Michail does all that he can to poison my life. . . . I do not sleep at night. . . . I . . ."

"Nathalie, what are you saying? What does he do? Everyone speaks so well of him; and really, he is so nice."

"Outwardly, certainly, all looks well. If I mention this, it is for the first time, and only to you because of our old friendship. Michail leads a fast life, returning home in the morning, passing his nights in restaurants and God only knows where else. . . ."

"Well, and what then, if he does so? Let him go to restaurants. He makes no secret of it before you. Do not forget, Nathalie, that you and I are over thirty years of age, and he is not yet twenty-five. Some are much worse at his age! You ought to be more lenient to him and overlook many things."

"What do you mean by overlooking things? To submit calmly to his drinking, and in the company of women too?"

Nathalie's nostrils quivered, and her eyes flashed angrily.

"If even they are present at such revels . . . well, that sort of woman doesn't count."

"That is not the case with such passionate and enthusiastic natures as Michail's. He is ever boiling over with some idea, his head is full of plans and wishes; he cannot do anything with equanimity and calm."

"Your Michail has a grand and artistic nature; it is difficult for him to keep within the bounds of life's prose, and he will constantly be breaking them one way or another. Well, I understand him."

"You do! I wish you had tried family life with such a man. Everlasting anxiety, everlasting fear. . . ."

"Leave him alone, forget your jealousy, and you will see that life with him is not so very hard to bear. Ah, if I were in your place, how I would enjoy my life!" Aline leaned her head against the back of the sofa, her long slender hands clasped behind. "I would play with my children, fondle them, press them to my heart, adorn their little bodies; I would have a lot of dresses, develop a regular cult for my body, tending it, anointing it with all kinds of perfumes and scents; I would enjoy the sight of myself decked in the finest of linen with beautiful lace, silk dressing-gowns, with the stuff falling so gracefully in long soft folds. . . . I would have tea-gowns of different colours, which I would wear like peplums. . . . Stockings, shoes—all would be exquisite, perfumed. . . . A woman's beauty fades and loses its brilliancy without these necessary accessories. . . ."

"And your husband? If you would do all this for your husband, it would mean that you love him, and if you loved him you would suffer as I do."

"You find suffering in everything, Nathalie, but I have grown so tired of suffering from the mean details of real life that if I were free from them I would look upon myself as the happiest of mortals."

"It is not at all so difficult. If it is not a matter of love for you, then why do you bear your poverty so long? Marry a rich man or find a friend with a heavy purse."

"Who told you that I did not want love? I never said that. If one must bear privations, then one must have love to make one forget them; but if one has the joys of a

luxurious life, one must know how to enjoy them. You have everything: a man whom you love and into whose arms you may creep; you may kiss and fondle your children. . . . Whereas I? Oh, how I sometimes dream, during the long dull nights, of a tiny baby, whom I would even adopt, to press him to my heart and cry over him, only not to be so lonely, so unnecessary to anyone. . . . But I cannot do it. I have barely enough for myself. I would consent to be an actress, to sing in a music-hall, anything, only not this dulness, this vegetation. . . ."

"Really, Aline, I see that you are quite irresponsible to-day, and I am so worried myself that I cannot comfort you."

"Don't, please don't. . . . I will be quite calm directly. There, you see, I am laughing again. . . . It is not worth while, truly, it is not worth while to grieve. . . . All will pass, and thank God that all passes! . . ."

Aline wiped away her tears, and, standing before the pier glass, powdered her flushed face with a small pocket powder-puff.

"My dear Aline, you are hysterical. Michail said the other day that you were an hysterical woman."

"How amusing!" Aline laughed merrily. "What put that into his head? How does he know?"

"I cannot tell, but I think he is right. Now, let us go into the drawing-room; Rykhloff and Tchagin are dining with us to-night. They will soon be here; it is already six o'clock."

Hearing the voices of Nathalie and her friend in the drawing-room, Michail, together with Tchagin, left the study and also went there. Tchagin was a fair-haired man of about thirty years of age, tall and thin as a reed, with a long thin nose and short-sighted grey eyes. He occupied a post in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was unmarried, with a good fortune, and possessed a very sweet temper, a taste for all that was beautiful, and a kind, sensitive heart.

"How pleasant it is to find you and Misha so well!" said Tchagin to Nathalie, seating himself beside her, while Michail was talking to Aline. "We often speak of you,

and are awaiting with impatience the time when you will come back to the banks of the Neva."

"What news have you, Sasha? Who is the fashion now? Who is in love, and with whom? How is the Duchess? I know you will tell me the truth."

"The fashion? Well, I really do not know; for my own part I only admire Garina and the Duchess; Garina is an enchanting beauty, and the Duchess is a beautiful enchantress."

"Please, Sasha, I beg you once for all: I will not have the name of Garina mentioned in my presence. She is my enemy, and I detest her."

"Yes, yes, I had forgotten. . . . I had quite forgotten that old story—that is to say, your fancy," laughed Tchagin. "It is past, Nathalie Georgievna, but you may believe me that Misha had nothing to do with her; Garina was then, and continues to be, *l'amie tendre* of the Duke Vladimir."

"One would not be in the way of the other. . . . So the Duke has become constant? I did not expect that. And what about the Duchess? I am in correspondence with her, but she writes about others and nothing about herself."

"The Duchess? She has changed greatly. . . ."

"In what sense?"

"H'm! . . . I thought you knew. . . ."

"What—is it a secret?"

"Have you any news of your ex-husband, Volynsky?"

"A-a-ah!" drawled Nathalie. "I guess he is in love with the Duchess?"

"Just fancy, it is she who is in love with Volynsky, madly in love. After the divorce he went abroad for a year, and she maddened us all with her fascinating coquetry, but now we do not recognize her. All her smiles are for him alone; she pays no attention to us. I think it is something serious."

"And Volynsky?"

"No one can guess. *Figé et superbe.*"

While Nathalie was talking to Tchagin, Michail, standing near the piano, was teasing Aline:

"If I were a sculptor, I would represent you as the god

Janus, with two faces: one would be veiled in sorrow and tears, the other wreathed in happy smiles. In you, Alexandra Vassilievna, all seems mixed up together—tears and laughter, sorrow and joy."

"How can you know? You are only acquainted with me about six months. Nathalie knows me very little too, for the reason that since we saw each other, about eight years ago, I have changed very much. Marriage and widowhood have made a deep impression on me. . . . No, it only seems to you that you know me. You even said I was hysterical. . . . That was nice, very nice! . . ."

"And even if I did say so? Hysterical women are very interesting; with them all is so unexpected, so involuntary. . . ."

"You need not try to justify yourself. . . . Tell me better who is this Tchagin?"

"A great friend of mine; I am very fond of him, and I have a great respect for him. He has an excellent heart. He knew Nathalie as a girl, and often visited at her parents' house. A splendid musician, he adores the theatre—in a word, he excels in everything. We have a small society in Petersburg of fervent admirers of art in all its branches; we used to assemble often and come home near morning, but no one was ever drunk. Tchagin was the founder, and is at the head of the society even now."

"Oh, how nice that is! How I always dreamed of something like that!" Aline clasped her hands in ecstasy. "Instead of that I am living the fourth year in a remote village with a deaf old aunt, reading the Lives of the Saints to her, mending stockings, patching dresses, weighing butter, flour and cheese-curds, taking her to the church in the village, where the psalmist drones the prayers. . . . O-oh, how loathsome I feel, and what joyous and happy gods you all seem to me!—so far removed from my humdrum and prosaic life."

"Then why not go away from that old aunt of yours? Live otherwise."

"I cannot, understand me, I cannot. How can one live on seventy roubles a month? . . . Oh, don't, don't let us

speak of this! Excuse me. . . . It is foolish of me. . . . I want to forget it all. Let us speak of you, of Tchagin, the Opera, anything you like, only not of me."

"But listen, Alexandra Vassilievna; I am sorry for you. Nathalie never told me that you . . . I mean that . . ."

"Yes, yes, I understand; but after my husband died I had nothing left except a heap of debts, seventy roubles a month, and a deaf aunt. . . . Ha-ha-ha!" Aline laughed nervously. "It was not worth while to speak of such dull things. . . . I want to forget them for an hour, for two. . . . This evening at the Opera, in a sea of sounds, all will be forgotten."

"Apropos, what are they giving to-night? Nathalie, with her revolting indifference to music and art, sends for a box without even knowing for what Opera."

"Yes, yes, I recognize her," laughed Aline; "she was the same as a girl. My singing master, an Italian, called her *cuore senza anima.*"

"That is a good definition," said Michail thoughtfully. "Nathalie is interested only in questions of the heart. . . . But still, what Opera are they giving to-night?"

"'Rigoletto,' beautiful 'Rigoletto.' I feel simply mad each time after that music. '*La donna e mobile*' . . ." sang Aline in a low voice.

". . . '*Qual' pium al vento*' . . ." continued Gourakin.

Aline opened the lid of the piano, in a moment found the right accompaniment to suit Michail's voice, and played it with great skill.

"No, wait a bit. . . . I will find Rigoletto's air. . . . There, I have it. . . . Now, go on. . . ."

Michail began first in a low voice, then he let himself be carried away by the music, and the soft and mellow notes filled the room. Tchagin ceased talking to Nathalie and listened to his friend with evident pleasure, his kind eyes screwed up, and his head moving in time with the music. Aline took up the duet of the second act. Suddenly her voice rang out in bright warm notes and merged itself with Michail's in one vibrating wave of sound. Tchagin rose from his seat, and, placing his pince-nez on his long thin

nose, approached the piano. Standing opposite to the singers, he watched Aline as if he had never seen her before. Aline's face became paler; her eyes had a far-away look, and seemed to be larger.

"You have a beautiful voice, Alexandra Vassilievna, and your accompaniment is artistic." Michail was gazing at her with undisguised admiration. "I did not suspect this! Why did you not tell us, Nathalie? How much time we have lost. . . . Now please sing alone."

Aline protested, but Tchagin took her arm and with gentle force made her return to the piano and take her seat.

"Traviata, the song with the goblet . . . please," begged Tchagin.

Aline began to sing. Michail and Tchagin exchanged approving glances.

By this time a new visitor had appeared at the door of the *salon*, and after a discreet bow had stopped on the threshold, awaiting the end of the song. Inclining to one side his smooth handsome head, he stood in the attitude of a man aware of his irresistible beauty, and allowing others to admire him. It seemed as if he, like all the others, was engrossed by the music, but it did not prevent him, however, from carefully examining the narrow patent leather toes of his irreproachable boots. After that he inspected the whiteness of his waistcoat, the brightness of his pink nails, and again resuming his immovable, picturesque attitude, he remained standing perfectly motionless until the song was finished.

Pavel Georgievitch Rykhloff, whom the men called "*la belle Pachette*," was very handsome; his face expressed self-assurance, coldness and indifference; he considered himself a representative of a higher race, had a limited mind, and could lie well and glibly. He was quite indifferent towards women, was passionately fond of hunting, had a metallic tone of voice, and liked to be looked at and listened to.

"I have just come in from the hunting-field," said Rykhloff loudly, addressing Michail so as to be heard by all. "The stalking was not very successful. I had a bad

number, however; the old wolves fell to my share, and not one escaped."

Rykhloff raised his narrow straight eyebrows and gazed around severely, as if defying anyone to misbelieve him.

"It is such a cold day, I would not agree to freeze outside for any amount of money," said Nathalie, wishing to break the silence which followed.

"But the cold is not so great, only eight degrees. It was glorious in the woods. I stood waiting for the wolf *four* hours"—Rykhloff spoke with emphasis—"and I did not notice the cold. . . ."

Rykhloff took possession of the mistress of the house, who detested stories of the hunting-field, and, distinctly emphasizing each word, related most improbable feats in which he was the principal agent. Michail, Tchagin and Aline, standing near the piano, talked of music. The butler announced dinner, and all went to the dining-room. Gourakin loved to give his guests good dinners and expensive wines; he was a merry and genial host, and his friends liked to come to him. Nathalie, despite her passionate love for her husband, still continued to be fond of society and men's admiration, and managed to create here, as at St. Petersburg, an interesting *salon*. After dinner all passed into the study, where the coffee and cigars were served. The men lit their cigars.

"I have come, my friend, as an envoy from our artistic circle," said Tchagin to Michail.

His long and thin figure, ensconced amid the soft cushions of the Turkish ottoman sofa, seemed quite boneless. Crossing his lean legs and lazily smoking his cigar, he gazed dreamily at the rings of blue smoke.

"The Duchess wishes to organize something for the benefit of the poor by the end of Lent; it fell to the share of our circle, as usual, to be the organizers. We have decided to have a concert and private theatricals. The piece is already selected. We want actors and artists. Your duty is to be both actor and artist."

Michail rose promptly from his chair and sat down beside Tchagin.

"Ah, this is excellent. . . . You say by the end of Lent? There is not much time left. . . . However . . . certainly we shall have plenty of time. . . ."

"There, good fellow!" Tchagin clapped Michail on the knee. "What a talented chap you have in your husband, Nathalie Georgievna—ready for anything!"

Nathalie did not respond to Tchagin's joking praises; her eyebrows were drawn together convulsively; she sat biting her nether lip.

"Bear in mind, Michail, that I am very particular in my choice of partners; we desire to surprise the public with unusual talent. The theatricals will take place in the palace. I hope the prospect of rehearsals and all the preparatory worry is not disagreeable to you? You will again breathe the air of our capital. I will take him under my wing, Nathalie Georgievna, and will look after him most strictly."

"Oh, he is completely free," she answered constrainedly; "he can do all that he likes."

"We have selected three pieces; in one of them the principal parts are given to you and Nellie Ivanovna Garina; you will both be splendid in these parts, but . . . there is a serious 'but.' The lovely Garina cannot boast a brilliant French accent, and that worries me. If we could give her a part in the other piece, whom could we have in her place?"

"*Comme toujours vous cherchez midi à quatorze heures*, my dear Sasha"—Nathalie spoke nervously—"here is an excellent actress for you"—she pointed to Aline. "She can play and sing; she will outshine all your beauties in the capital."

"Great God, but certainly, certainly!"

Tchagin rose abruptly and stopped before Aline in an attitude of supplication.

"No, no and no! For nothing in the world! Do not ask me! I am quite out of it; I have not been anywhere for four years. . . . I do not want to stir up bygone memories. . . . No . . . no. . . ."

Aline stood up with outstretched hands. She was sur-

rounded and implored to consent. Nathalie was the most persistent, the most urgent, in her pleading.

"But, Nathalie, cannot you understand why I am unable to consent?" cried Aline with a feeling of sincere despair.

"Well, wait a bit. It is time to go to the Opera now; come to my room to arrange ourselves, and there we will hold council."

With these words Nathalie drew her away. On entering the boudoir and shutting the door Nathalie, pale with excitement, turned to Aline.

"I implore you, Aline, in the name of our old friendship, I implore you to consent. . . . For my peace of mind, for my happiness. . . . Again the excitement of the Petersburg life, again all those temptations. . . . I know Misha. . . . I do not want, I cannot bear, to have him there all the time with that Garina . . . and all those women. . . ."

Nathalie spoke hurriedly, brokenly. Her voice trembled with unshed tears. Aline stood looking at her friend with wide open, astonished eyes.

"But what can I do? How can I help you? You are exaggerating, Nathalie. And, lastly, to take part in such private theatricals in the highest society, one must spend at least a thousand roubles; I have no frocks, I have nothing. . . ."

"Aline, be a true friend to me. You were complaining just now that no one needs you; well, now I need you. Oh, do not turn away, do me this favour; allow me to bear the expenses of your trip and your dresses. . . ."

"Oh, Nathalie . . . I cannot do such a thing. . . ."

But Nathalie would not let her speak. She hugged her, put her hand to her lips and burst into tears at last. Aline ended by consenting, although she could not yet understand why her participation in the theatricals was wanted.

"Darling, thank you, thank you. I know that you are honest and good; I know that you will help me. I saw how when you sang to-day Michail's eyes glowed. He is ready to fall in love with you, because you have an artist's nature. . . . Ah, do not interrupt me, I know him. . . . You will act with him, you will sing, you will have beauti-

ful dresses. . . . Captivate him and he will not look at anyone else there, and I will be sure of him; I know you and your sense of honour."

"You are mad! . . . You are mad! . . ." laughed Aline. "It is you who are the hysterical one, not I. . . . To take part at once in two comedies, to act two parts! It is too funny. . . . I will not know how to do it."

"You will know that; I will teach you."

They entered the study with animated, laughing faces. Aline's consent was greeted by Tchagin and Michail with loud and merry acclamations.

"Please, Nathalie," Michail said to his wife, "go to the Opera without us. Pavel Georgievitch will be your cavalier, and we will await you here with Sasha. We will prepare a supper for you and have a good talk."

Rykhloff stood in a picturesquely expectant attitude. Nathalie, against her will, thanked him graciously for his willingness to accompany them; she was very much displeased with the sudden change of plans. In a few moments they were off. Michail and Tchagin disposed themselves comfortably on the wide sofa. No lamps were lit. The fire was burning, and the room was plunged in a soft half light.

V.

"And so, my old friend," began Tchagin, when they remained alone, "I am very glad that I have at last seen your cosy 'home.' You are looking very well, Nathalie Georgievna also. That means that all is going on splendidly?"

"Splendidly is rather a strong word."

Michail was softly clinking his spurs on his outstretched feet and thoughtfully gazing at the blue flames in the chimney as they leaped from the bright red fire, now disappearing, now reappearing again on the charred bits of wood.

"At least, I would like to hear from you that you do not regret anything. . . . I hope that I may ask this question by the right of a friend?"

"You can—certainly you can. You see, I am very glad that you came and that we can sit so comfortably and have a talk. These last two years I have a lot on my heart. You know my nature: I am always lighthearted and gay, but still there are moments when I feel the need of collecting my thoughts and sharing my doubts with someone. You ask me whether I regret anything? That is just it: I regret very much my lost liberty. With Nathalie I cannot be my own self. You must know her well; she is so very intolerant; she denies everything that is not congenial to her nature; she is despotic, and chiefly, Sasha, she is absurdly, savagely jealous. You know me also: I do not like to tell lies, but I assure you she will make me do so."

"Yes, Misha, I foresaw all this, because I know you both so well. Yes, yes," continued Tchagin with his head reclining on the cushions, "I foresaw this, and more than once I hinted to you that if Nathalie Georgievna is not quite

happy with Volynsky, she will be downright unhappy with any other husband. Hers is a nature which demands the tight hand of an experienced and serious man. You are too young for such a woman. . . . However, what is done is done. Try to give up to her as much as you can."

"It is not so much the giving up to her. Nathalie is prose itself. You cannot imagine how destitute she is of all impulse, of all strivings after beauty and art. She is so *terre-à-terre* that, besides dresses, children, servants, money, visits, balls and Court scandal, she is not interested in anything. She neither understands nor likes music or singing; literature does not interest her; she never reads anything—drama, opera, circus and operetta are all the same to her. I have no wish to share with her my impressions, or my small inspirations, so precious to me. A few days ago I received from Matlin a very witty description of their fête in verse. I answered also in verse, and, do you know, it was very successful. I went to her and read both his verses and mine, and she did not even smile. 'What pleasure can you both find in such nonsense! Matlin would do better if he were to try to be a good husband instead of writing stupid verses.' 'Well, and Pushkin—what should he have done instead of writing poetry?' I asked her. 'Pushkin was a poet, and Matlin is a fool,' she answered. You will allow that it was enough to make anyone angry and unwilling to speak to her at all. You know how I love music, but if I sit down to the piano, I prefer to do so after closing the door previously. I wrote a small valse one day. I thought it good; I played it with pleasure, and everyone liked it very much; only Nathalie found nothing else to say but that it was a 'foolish valse,' and that I had composed it to fascinate a certain young lady. . . . In general, according to her ideas, a worthy husband and serious man must not admire nor like anything but his lawful wife, his children, and his household. There is a notion of wedded life for you! On these grounds we have quarrels. I will not cede to her one iota of my maybe senseless but most precious impulses. I am ready to have quarrels every day, but to please her I will not desist from

what constitutes the best part of our existence. No, no, for nothing in the world! Let her be as mad as she likes. . . . I will be what I am."

"Poor Mishuk! You are tasting the sweets of married life," smiled Tchagin. "Do not grieve. We will support you from Petersburg. Our circle values you very highly; we hold you in great honour. It is a pity that you have left Petersburg. This year our meetings were very, very interesting; Tchaïkovsky used to come, Apukhtin . . ."

"There you are also! Allow that it was no small sacrifice for me to leave my regiment and the capital. But do you think that she understands what it cost me? Not a bit! 'There are people everywhere,' she says, 'and for you the provincial life is better; you will be more steady.' She will exhaust my patience some day; I will show her the very devil. . . ."

"No, you had better not show her anything," laughed Tchagin.

"Oh, Sasha, I confess, sometimes I feel such a devil in me, such a desire to do something quite impossible. . . . And as if it were on purpose, I never could bear jealous women, and now, just see!"

"And how are the children? Are you a loving father?"

"My children are all right. I adore my little Mimi. A lovely child, intelligent and extraordinarily caressing."

"And how are your relations with Dounaisky, that old money-bag?"

"Fancy! I have managed by a sort of miracle to please the old man, and we are on the best of terms. A queer fellow and a miser. . . . Sometimes one has to practise a little innocent deceit towards him. He will soon agree to hide my peccadilloes from Nathalie, it seems, and even to protect me from her attacks. He is nearly eighty, but he does not think of dying—a wonderfully healthy constitution. It were time for the old man to go; his millions would be just the thing for us. While awaiting them Nathalie and I are getting rather deeply into debt."

"It is the fashion to be in debt at present," Tchagin said with a smile.

"Have you seen Prince Alexei lately?" asked Michail after a moment's silence.

"I saw him just before leaving town. I sincerely pity him. His life has turned out miserably. Princess Anna Valerianovna is quite crazy with her cunning priest. All this idea of building a convent is of his invention; she is completely under his influence, and the poor Prince totally subjugated by Petrova. She is robbing him all round, and wherever possible drawing attention to their liaison. I heard that the Princess intends to leave Petersburg and remove to Moscow to manage the convent herself; she may even take the veil! Such nonsense! People do not know how to live!"

"And you, Sasha? How are you getting on?"

"My life is not interesting. I am vegetating."

"You ought to be ashamed to say so, you, a free poet and thinker, who can live just as you like."

"I can live as I like, but all around me I see such triviality and vulgarity, so little sense of beauty, that involuntarily, living among other people, one has to desist from one's gods. Culture is not deep. You may say what you like, but Christianity has turned back the course of refined culture. People have forgotten beauty and heroism. The worship of the ancient gods was full of beauty, and our rites are senseless and dull. Cruelty has remained the same as at the time of the heathens, only its form is changed. Are our wars more humane than the old ones? The idea of Divinity in cultured nations will always remain the impersonation of a wise and powerful force, but the form of this idea was more beautiful in the days of Rome and Greece, it gave more scope to the creative genius, more sources for the creation of imperishable beauty. I am a heathen at heart, and I never felt any admiration for the lives of the saints, their recluse habits and revocation of the world. What good did it bring? What was their object? Only to preach abstinence and contempt of the body, love of self-torture, and martyrdom? It is abnormal, completely foreign to a healthy and strong constitution. Instead of strengthening, loving and improving the body, Christianity

teaches us to disfigure it. Oh, ye gods of the Olympus! Oh, their imperishable, poetical, inspiriting beauty!"

In speaking Tchagin had risen from the sofa and stopped in the middle of the room with upraised hands, as if calling upon the invisible deities. His long shadow lay on the walls and on the ceiling; in the red half light of the fire he seemed unnaturally tall. Michail had listened in silence, following his thought with interest, and did not break the silence at once.

"No, Sasha, you are not right. The ancient gods killed the spirit; Christianity revived and elevated it."

"What is the result of such revival after two thousand years? The ancients organized beautiful bacchanals in honour of their gods, we become drunk and debauched in a vulgar and ugly way; they erected temples to the God of Love and love was raised to a cult, we have hideous public-houses where woman is dragged down to the level of beasts; we thrust her into these dens, we profit by her, and it is we who trample her into the dirt. They had slaves and disposed of their lives, and we have created such conditions for the people that their existence is not better than that of serfs; they loved life and were strong in spirit, we do not love anything, and are simply marching on to physical and moral degeneration."

"It is difficult for me to argue with you; you have read and thought more than I, but I am sure that you are not right. Christianity teaches a man humility, creates spiritual ideals. . . . For instance, life beyond the grave: you do not believe in it?"

"You are mistaken—I believe in the immortality of the soul, but certainly in quite another way than you do. You speak of humility, and I can remark that a man with a noble and refined nature will retain it even if he is a heathen; whereas even religion will not soften a man who is cruel and hard by nature. I can cite any number of examples: John the Terrible, who did not cede the palm to Nero or Caligula, Maluta Skuratoff, the landowners who beat their serfs to death. Remember the Inquisition, with its refined

cruelty; read the history of tortures used by all the Christian nations, our dungeons, our chastisements in the name of the law. . . . Read the history of France and her refined and cruel depravity before the Revolution, and you will see clearly that humanity has not progressed in the culture of the spirit. I know that you, as well as all your family, are a deeply religious man; I know that you find consolation in prayer, you go to church and follow all the rites. I never go to church, do not keep the holidays, cannot bear the priests, and have long forgotten all the prayers; but am I such a very bad man, Misha?"

Tchagin smiled and looked at Gourakin with his kind, short-sighted eyes. Michail laughed without answering, it was unnecessary; it was difficult to find anyone kinder-hearted, more ready to help, and gentler than Tchagin.

"You pray to God, the Mother of God, St. Nicholas, your Guardian Angel; you keep holy the day of John the Baptist, of Elias; and I bow down only before the Deity of a Wise Power. I worship the beauty of the ancient gods as an æsthete. I have come to the conclusion that a man is born either with a consciousness of his soul, and then he strives for good and the love to his neighbour, or he lacks this consciousness, and then nothing and no one can teach him the meaning of goodness. Princess Anna Valerianovna is always talking of God and Christ's commandments, but I really have never met a harder, colder, or more intolerant nature than hers. What is our religion? Only a uniform. It is high time to leave all this. Worship whom and how you like—that is of no importance. . . . Guard your soul and keep it pure until the hour of your death—that is what is wanted and is important."

Tchagin was silent, and again resumed his seat beside Michail. Silence reigned in the room, only the wood crackled in the fire.

"Sasha, life is really good, is it not?" asked Michail softly, gazing pensively into the flames.

"Certainly it is good! And especially is it good for

those who know how to live, without complicating it or distorting it to please other people."

"But I have complicated mine," sighed Michail. "I may confess to you that I feel the weight of the yoke of wedded life . . . especially the absence of liberty and the constant control. Please, Sasha, call me as soon as possible to Petersburg for the theatricals. I will stay a month and rest from the bonds of Hymen. Nathalie will not like to leave the children, and will only arrive for the play."

"All right, I will cable to you immediately; but if you are going to be naughty, then know that Nathalie Georgievna will never forgive me for these theatricals, and we will be in enmity for life. Do you know that the pretty blonde, Aline, is a good help? She has a splendid voice, very good looks for the stage, and it seems to me she must act well."

"I cannot give you any information about her, as she has just arrived from the country to pass the winter here. I know that she was Nathalie's friend before her marriage, that her husband was a wealthy General, who lost his fortune and died, and she is always in the clouds, hoping for something, cursing her lot. She seldom goes into society, but she meets with success. Nathalie, it seems, wants to have her as a confidante," Michail added, smiling.

Gourakin relieved his mind in friendly talk with Tchagin. The prospect of the forthcoming trip to the capital, where he would again plunge into the gay life of the society he knew so well, made him glad and animated, and when the voices of the party returning from the theatre were heard he pressed Tchagin's hand, and thanking him for his unalterable friendship, he went to meet his wife joyfully and kindly, forgetting her bad humour and her wish to find a pretext for a quarrel with him.

A few days later Michail got a telegram from Tchagin informing him that his presence was needed for the rehearsals, which were about to begin. Nathalie was, as her husband said, *d'une humeur massacrante*. She kept finding hundreds of reasons and pretexts to induce Michail to

refuse to take part in the theatricals, but the more irritated she became, the more was he in a hurry to depart. Before leaving he went to say good-bye to Dounaisky. The old man received him graciously, begged him not to stay too long in Petersburg, and, hearing that Nathalie was in a bad temper, promised to have a talk with her. After Michail's departure, Nathalie began to hurry Aline to be off; she wrote to Baroness Kern asking her to receive her and to introduce her to her friends.

Aline was rather oppressed by the idea of the money which she had taken from Nathalie, but the thirst for amusement and gaiety, which she was deprived of since the death of her husband, drove all other thoughts from her mind, and she rushed from shop to shop, and dressmakers and modistes, dreamed of successes, looked at herself in the glass, and quite forgot the part that Nathalie wished her to play. She hoped to be able to make a brilliant conquest, and looking at herself in the glass, which reflected her supple figure in the black dress with the large black hat with feathers, which she was to wear at the first rehearsal, she felt sure that she would conquer anyone she liked. Aline belonged to the class of women whose condition of mind depends exclusively on the consciousness of their charms, which, in their turn, only come out fully in congenial surroundings. The more elegant the latter, the firmer the conviction of the power of the charms, and the more assurance in the use of them. Aline was unrecognizable: she looked much prettier; animation lent a new sparkle to her eyes, her lips were always wreathed in smiles. She knew herself to be charming, and the knowledge added to her beauty.

A few days after Michail's departure Nathalie received a letter from him asking her to speak to Moissei Borisovitch about a sum of money which he needed for his stay in the capital, where he had to bear great expenses. Michail forbore to let his wife know that his grandmother, Mme. Gourakina, had given him a thousand roubles on the day of his arrival, knowing how much such pleasures cost.

Nathalie called Moissei Borisovitch to her and asked him to get double the amount that Michail asked for. The steward listened in silence as usual, and promised to get the money. Two days later the desired amount was in Nathalie's hands. Aline, well dressed and animated, accompanied by her friend's requests to write as often and as fully as possible, started for Petersburg to begin the life which she had been longing for and dreaming of so many years.

VI

THE first rehearsal was to take place at Baroness Shellman's, a recognized beauty, who spared neither her own nor anyone else's reputation. The stage-manager was the general favourite, Sasha Tchagin, who had decreed that no one but the actors was to be present at the rehearsals. Some exceptions were, however, allowed at the request of the Duchess. By nine o'clock all had to be there, but it was already half-past nine and only five or six persons had arrived. Tchagin kept taking out his large gold chronometer and peering at it with his short-sighted eyes, shaking his small sleek head with mild reproof, and, measuring the length of the *salon* and drawing-room with large steps, he peeped into the hall, and was visibly becoming agitated. The hostess, coquettishly folding her white fur pelerine round her shoulders, was alternately chaffing and calming him.

"Sasha, will you keep still for ten minutes? Come, sit down by me and tell me why you are looking longer and thinner. . . . Really, joking apart, sit down here. If you are going to avoid me, I will begin to believe something that I suspect. . . ."

The Baroness laughed maliciously, gazing from under her eyelids at Tchagin, who stopped before her.

"What is it you suspect, *chère baronne?* I am not so trusting as Prince Alexei, and not so easy to tease."

"That means you surrender, *cher* Sasha?"

"I do not surrender. . . ."

"Excellent! Then you are invulnerable?"

"I am."

"I know why!" the Baroness laughed merrily, hiding her face in her furs up to her eyes, which sparkled with a

naughty and provoking gaiety. "Why did you go to Moscow, *mauvais garnement?*"

"But you know as well as I: to invite Michail Gourakin to take part in the theatricals."

"You could do that by letter. . . . And how is the beautiful Pachette Rykhloff?"

The Baroness looked straight into Tchagin's eyes, whose face was covered with a slight blush for a hardly perceptible moment. He took off his pince-nez, put it on again, and remained silent, as if he could find no answer.

"You are malicious and indiscreet, and I don't like you any more," he said at last, turning to go.

"Sasha, you are offended? Come, let us make peace; let us be friends again. Here are both my hands for a kiss. So! You need not have been offended; *on dit que c'est de la dernière mode. . . .*"

"You are beginning again?"

"I will not, I swear, by the eyes of the beautiful Pachette, I will not any more. . . ."

The belated actors were coming in by now. The drawing-room was soon full of animated guests. Tchagin was being pulled one way and another. Baroness Kern arrived with Aline, after them Michail, with a handsome young General in the suite of the Emperor, with whom he had been dining. The General was a favourite of the ladies and of fate. His name was Boris Alexeievitch, but in society he was known under the name of Prince Bibiche. The reputation of an irresistible flirt had become so attached to him that if he only danced an extra valse with a lady society exchanged meaning smiles behind the fair one's back, and the next day everyone spoke of Prince Bibiche's new conquest.

In the *salon* all was ready for the rehearsal, and everyone was only awaiting the arrival of the Duchess. The servants were handing round tea, fruits and bonbons. In the drawing-room and *salon* there was a hum of laughter and brilliant French phrases.

"*Écoute, mon vieux,*" Prince Bibiche addressed Michail Gourakin, drawing him aside from a group of ladies and gentlemen with whom Michail had been talking with

animation: "*qui est cette belle blonde aux yeux passionés?*"

"I really do not know . . ." answered Michail absently, trying to follow the interrupted conversation.

"How you do not know? I saw myself how she gave you her gloves to put away about ten minutes ago."

"Ah, that one! That is a friend of my wife's." Michail gave Aline's name and surname.

"Married?"

"She is a widow."

"A-a-ah," drawled the General approvingly, "please introduce me at the first opportunity."

Aline was speaking to Tchagin at that moment; he was showing her some alterations to be made in her part. She was following his instructions with attention, but at the same time she had caught the look that the handsome General had directed towards her; she blushed slightly, and guessed that the General was speaking about her with Michail. Her woman's instinct whispered to her that Prince Bibiche was admiring her. She raised her head, and as if accidentally threw a kind and sparkling glance towards the place where he stood.

"*Ça y est,*" said the dashing General to himself, answering the look.

". . . There it is . . . there it is. . . . At last! . . ." thought Aline with beating heart. Her eyes flashed, a delicate pink blush played on the milky pallor of her face, and she looked still prettier.

"How is it your wife let you come, Michelinka?" Nellie Garina was asking Michail. "I laid a wager that she would not allow you to leave her, and I have lost to Matlin and Prince Bibiche two bottles of champagne each. Come to dinner to-morrow; we will drink them. You have grown devilishly handsome, Michelinka, and I am awfully angry with Tchagin that he did not make me your partner instead of that fascinating blonde. I will pull his long nose, and if I catch you flirting with her I will complain to your Nathalie directly."

"No, Nellie Ivanovna, anything you like, but not that.

Please be kind; let me breathe the air of the capital in freedom."

"A-ah, Michelinka, you are begging now! . . . Well, well, be as naughty as you like, but not behind my back."

At this moment the servant announced the arrival of the Duchess, and the hostess went to meet her.

Tchagin begged everyone to begin the rehearsal at once, and proceeded to arrange the chairs so as to divide part of the room appointed for the actors.

The Duchess entered the room with light and quick steps, laughing and talking merrily with the hostess. While exchanging greetings her look travelled round the room rapidly and imperceptibly, and a slight shade crossed her face.

"If all are here, the rehearsal may begin," said the Duchess.

"All are here, except Volynsky," answered Baroness Shellman; "he has sent to say that he will be a little late."

The Duchess's face brightened.

"As he is not an actor, but only a spectator, we will not wait for him," remarked Tchagin, and clapped his hands.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please go on the stage. Prince, I beg you," addressing Prince Bibiche; "Nellie Ivanovna, you begin. Where is the prompter? Now please, messieurs et mesdames, silence. We are beginning."

The rehearsal began. After several phrases pronounced by Nellie Garina and Prince Bibiche on the stage all were silent, and followed the dialogues with interest. Tchagin interrupted the rehearsal several times, indicating the places and begging for repetitions.

The piece was performed in a lively and gay manner.

"Charming! . . . Very good, indeed," said the Duchess, pressing Garina's hand. "But could you not insert a little music? You have such a beautiful voice, Nellie Ivanovna; some tsigane song. What do you say to this, *monsieur le régisseur?*"

"I think, Your Highness, that the piece will be improved if Nellie Ivanovna will consent to sing. It will be very

easy to insert it. The accompaniment may be heard from behind the scenes. . . ."

Garina sang several songs to choose from. The mellow contralto voice of the beauty filled the large room with its warm soft notes. All were applauding, arguing, choosing the songs. At this moment Volynsky entered. When he approached the Duchess she greeted him with a warm glance which rested on him for a second.

"At last! . . ." whispered she while he was kissing her hand. "Michail Gourakin is here. Had they warned you?" she added quickly, and Volynsky felt her hand press his closely and kindly.

Michail Gourakin and Volynsky bowed to one another without the least affectation, like very slight acquaintances. Baroness Kern had called the day before on Volynsky and warned him of the coming meeting with Gourakin.

"How can he incommode me, this Gourakin, now that he is Nathalie's husband?" Volynsky had answered calmly.

After the divorce he had passed a year abroad, and had come back looking younger, still more interesting and impenetrable in women's eyes. All this season he was seen near the Duchess, but no one could guess what he felt for her. The Duchess made no secret of her preference for him; without him the balls and parties seemed dull to her. She concentrated on him all her inexhaustible fund of coquetry. Volynsky, as if fulfilling the duties of a real courtier, seemed to foresee all her wishes; he was near her when she wished it, but he remained calm and equal in his manner towards her. The calmer he was, the more excited and nervous she became. Under his half-closed eyelids he knew how to hide his glance when he followed her classically beautiful figure in the ball-room. He desired and hoped for her love, not a passing flirtation, and he weighed each of her words and looks, jealously guarding and hiding his own feeling until, assured of her love, he could open his heart to her.

Now Aline was on the stage. The two-act French piece began with a song. Her well-trained, full voice flowed in mellow and sonorous waves of sound. . . .

"Bravo, bravo! . . ." was heard on all sides.

"A lovely voice," Volynsky said under his breath to Baroness Kern, who was sitting beside him.

"She is pretty too," said the Baroness in a low voice.

"Do you admire her?" asked the Duchess, who had heard his remark.

"I have not spoken two words with her, but from here she seems charming. She has something special in her; I would say she is the type of a true lady."

The Duchess had at once set Aline down as an interesting person when the latter was presented to her, and now after Volynsky's words she examined her attentively through her golden lorgnette.

". . . *J' effeuillerais les roses sous tes pas, et je mourrais si c'était ton envie* . . ." sang Aline, and as if accidentally her eyes rested on Prince Bibiche.

The Prince stood at the back of the *salon*, leaning against a column. He knew all the pretty women of the Petersburg society and the *cocottes;* Aline, as something new, interested him greatly. He had not been presented to her yet, but he felt that an invisible thread was drawing him to her. Having discovered where Garina was sitting apart with Matlin, and trying to move softly to avoid clinking his spurs, the Prince carefully passed behind the columns, and, coming up to her, bent down to her ear:

"Nellie Ivanovna, I have a favour to ask of you. . . ."

"Ah, you madman! . . . How you frightened me! . . ."

Garina gave a slight cry, and laughed, hiding her face in her muff to stifle the sound.

"Nellie Ivanovna, will you do it?"

"Speak: what is it, you irresistible flirt?"

"I ask you very much: invite this beautiful blonde to your dinner to-morrow."

"How? . . . Already? . . . But, *mon général*, you are simply impossible. You have hardly seen her. . . ."

". . . And have fallen in love," added the Prince.

"I know your manner of falling in love. Nothing but sin. Very well, I will invite her, but provided that after

dinner we go in troikas to hear the tsiganes singing. Agreed?"

"Your wish is law. Everything will be ready. You're a true friend; let me kiss your hand."

In expectation of the pleasure awaiting him on the following day Prince Bibiche began to prepare a plan of his love campaign, and putting up his eyeglass he stood watching and appraising attentively all the points in Aline, who was still on the stage.

After the rehearsal, which ended very late, the guests passed into the dining-room. Baroness Shellman was an attentive hostess, and knew by instinct what would please her guests. She always managed to place them at table in such a way that neighbours were satisfied with each other. The Duchess had Volynsky beside her; Garina, a bald and subtle diplomat, who assured her, and not without foundation, that neither Spain nor Italy had ever produced beauty equal to hers. Aline's neighbour was Prince Bibiche; Michail Gourakin sat near the hostess, to whose charms he had fallen a victim ever since his arrival in St. Petersburg. As usual after rehearsals the company was most animated. The free manners of the stage seemed to have been transferred to the drawing-room; the good wines plentifully served helped to maintain and increase the high spirits. When the company rose from the table it was quite late, but the hostess ordered the wine, coffee and liqueurs to be brought into the *salon*, and the guests continued their merriment. Michail, slightly excited by the wine, flatly refused to sit down to the piano to accompany Aline, declaring that he could not exist a second without the Baroness. Everyone was urgently begging her to sing, but she did not like playing her own accompaniment when in company. Volynsky rose from his place, went up to Aline, offered her his arm with a polite bow, and conducted her to the piano.

"Bravo! . . . Bravo! . . ." was heard on all sides.

No one had expected that Volynsky would sit down to play, as he had never before accompanied anyone's singing, although many people knew him to be a good musician. Aline, flattered by the attention of the brilliant statesman,

excited by her success, sang magnificently. She was joined by Garina, and they sang several duets. Under the sound of their beautiful voices the passionate music-lovers whispered softly in the corners of the room. The Duchess kept her lorgnette fixed on Volynsky and Aline. A feeling of irrepressible jealousy possessed her, and she had to make great efforts over herself to hide under the mask of a smile the tears that were welling up. It was the first time in her life that she was experiencing such a degrading feeling, the first time that anyone was deaf to her wishes and intentionally incomprehensive of her desires. She who was accustomed to have her smile regarded as the highest bliss, who was used to torture, to inflict the pain of jealousy upon others, now felt herself suffering and longing each time for a new meeting. Two years ago, after their conversation about the divorce, she was so sure of her victory, but the head of the fascinating statesman, bent in deference before her rank, did not bend lower, and the Duchess could not find out what he felt, nor what were his thoughts. At this moment, surprised by Volynsky's readiness to go to the piano, she was watching with fast beating heart every gesture and look of his. She saw how he was saying something to Aline while turning over the leaves of the music, and, so it seemed to her, smiling in the charming way which he knew drew all hearts to him. . . . Then, softly touching the keys with one hand, he sat looking at Aline, while she was laughing merrily and relating some story to him.

". . . He has quite forgotten me . . . forgotten that I exist . . ." thought the Duchess, not hearing at the moment what the Baroness Kern was telling her.

". . . I think Pavlik is *en train de lui faire la cour*," the Duchess heard suddenly, "and really she is very lovely and full of talents."

"Is Mr. Volynsky capable of losing his heart?"

The Duchess was making an effort to appear quite composed.

"With men, *votre altesse*, one never knows. . . ."

After the singing, Matlin recited some comic verses. The candles were beginning to burn out when the guests rose

to take leave. Prince Bibiche asked Aline's permission to see her home in his carriage.

"Oh, but where are my gloves?" cried she. "I took them off, and I cannot remember where I put them."

"From the moment that you appeared I could not keep my eyes off you, and I saw you give them to Gourakin, which made me very jealous," added the Prince in a low voice.

Aline laughed and went to look for Michail. He was not to be seen, either in the *salon* or in the drawing-room. She ran into a small Chinese room, and started back as if stung. Michail, on his knees, was showering tender kisses on the hostess, who was half reclining on a low sofa. He had his face towards the door, and although the room was half lit he recognized Aline. Baroness Shellman had not heard her steps, which were stifled by the soft carpet. Aline left without her gloves. Prince Bibiche was afraid that her hands would be cold, and covered them with kisses all the way. Aline felt as if in a fairy dream. The week in Petersburg had flown by like one day. Making calls, dressing, new friends had occupied all her mind. She only thought of herself, saw Michail very seldom, and not only did not try to captivate him but even forgot him quite. She was happy to be in the gay world again, and cared for no one and nothing else. She only wrote short notes in answer to Nathalie's anxious letters, saying that all was going on well, that Michail passed his time mostly at his grandmother's or at Prince Alexei's house.

She knew very well that Gourakin was out every day either with his comrades at the restaurants or at balls and dinners to which everyone was inviting him. Tired and happy, Aline lay down to sleep, pleased with the thought of the dinner at Garina's on the next day, when she would again meet Prince Bibiche. She suddenly remembered the scene in the Chinese drawing-room and laughed drowsily.

"If only Nathalie could know," passed through her mind, "she would be quite crazy. One cannot keep such a handsome husband tied to one's skirts. How interesting Volynsky is! . . . The Prince is better. . . . Is he in

love, or does he see that I am interested in him? . . . Oh, how nice it all is; how happy I am! . . . To-morrow I will wear my mauve dress, it suits me so well. . . . It fits so closely, and the shoulders are bare. . . . What a beauty Garina is! . . . And what a figure the Duchess has! . . . And I? The Prince assures me that my eyes are both languishing and passionate. . . . *'Vous êtes d'un chic parisien,'* he said. . . . Dear Prince! . . . I am crazy about him. . . . I am in love. . . . *'Si tu m'aimais . . . si l'ombre de ma vie.' . . .*"

Aline's thoughts became confused, and she fell asleep to dream of the joys of life and love.

When the Duchess took leave of Volynsky in the Baroness's drawing-room her face was slightly pale.

"Are you feeling well, Your Highness? You are pale, . . ." asked Volynsky in French.

"I am not feeling quite well," she answered.

Her usually laughter-loving eyes were sad. Volynsky offered his arm and asked for permission to see her home. He had a keen knowledge of woman's psychology. His amiability towards Aline was intentional. He marked the hidden jealousy of the Duchess and triumphed. He would like to kiss her hands in his gratitude to her, but he restrained himself.

"You over-exert yourself, Your Highness," said Volynsky in French as usual, when they were in the carriage. "You go to bed too late; this is telling on your health."

"You are mistaken; I am quite well. . . ."

"But why are you so pale and so sad?"

The Duchess was silent. She felt inclined to cry. Her nerves were strained, and, afraid of betraying herself, she did not speak.

"You do not wish to answer me? . . . I ask pardon for my presumption, Your Highness."

"Ah no . . . do not excuse yourself. . . . I am sad, sad, sad! . . . But what is that to you? . . . My inner life does not interest you. . . . You are so taken up by others. . . ."

"I?" asked Volynsky in a low voice. He bent low

towards her and, taking her hand, softly pressed a tender kiss on it. "'*J'effeuillerais les roses sous tes pas*' . . ." he repeated with emphasis the words of the song they had just been hearing.

"You! . . . *Les roses sous mes pas?*"

The Duchess turned towards him and gazed at him several seconds with wide open and as if frightened eyes.

"Repeat it, repeat it. . . . I do not believe you. . . ."

"'*Si tu m'aimais*' . . ." said Volynsky in a still lower voice.

"*Mais je vous aime* . . ." burst in a passionate exclamation from her lips.

"For always—till the end of the world?" asked Volynsky, clasping the little hands and with a deep look into her eyes.

"Till the end of the world," she replied passionately, the tears filling her eyes.

The carriage had reached the palace; the servant opened the door.

"Till to-morrow?" asked the Duchess.

"Till to-morrow and for ever . . ." answered Volynsky, pressing a hot kiss on the small hand which was extended to him for life.

VII

It was nearly midday when on the next morning Aline, after her bath, in a white morning gown with broad sleeves open at the shoulders and knots of blue ribbon, and her golden hair streaming down her back, sat down to her breakfast. She occupied two rooms in one of the best hotels in the centre of the town. She was lazily scanning the papers and yawning. Before going to Garina's dinner she had some interesting calls to make.

"I shall wear my steel grey dress and the hat with the black feathers. . . . For dinner I shall put on my mauve. . . . I must let the hairdresser know . . ." she was thinking.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in."

Aline thought it was the chambermaid. Michail Gourakin stood on the threshold.

"I am not dressed," she began confusedly. "However, never mind, come in, Michail Vladimirovitch. . . . What good wind blows you here? How cross you look! Did you have a bad night? I slept excellently."

Michail's face kept its frown; he took the seat indicated to him.

"Have you only just got up?"

"Certainly. And you yourself? It is enough to look at your face to see that you have left your bed—that is why you are so cross," laughed Aline.

"I am cross because I could not sleep."

"Poor boy!"

"Hear me, please, Alexandra Vassilievna. I have come to you on a matter of business," Michail interrupted her.

"That is a pity; I am quite incapable of attending to business now."

"I shall not be long. May I smoke?"

"As much as you like, and state your business quicker; there are many things much more interesting."

"May I ask, Alexandra Vassilievna, have you written to Nathalie to-day?"

"No, I have not."

"Will you write?"

"Certainly I will, if not to-day, then to-morrow. What is the matter?"

"What shall you write about?"

"Dear me, how persistent you are! About many things. . . ."

"H'm! . . ."

Gourakin rose from his chair and began to twirl his moustache nervously.

"*Voyons, cher ami, quelle mouche vous a piqué?* Speak reasonably."

"Well then, listen, Alexandra Vassilievna: I know that you are very frank with Nathalie, that she desired you to take part in these theatricals, and that you are charged to look after me. If it were not for the meeting in the Chinese room I would continue to pretend that I do not see or suspect anything. Baroness Shellman did not know that in dealing with me she depended at the same time on you and your kind interest in me. And so I have come to tell you that if you write to Nathalie anything of what you saw yesterday, then I . . ."

"Silence!—be silent this minute. . . . How dare you! How can you say such things to me! . . ." he suddenly heard Aline cry wrathfully.

While he was speaking her eyes grew darker and darker, and she turned from pale to red. With his last words she jumped up and struck the table with clenched fist. The silver tray with the coffee service resounded and the spoon fell down. Aline pushed it aside with her slipper. Michail, interrupted in the middle of his speech, stood gazing at Aline with uplifted brows in astonishment. . . .

". . . One must be a villain oneself to suspect me of such meanness. Who gave you the right to speak to me like,

that? Do you think I will allow it? No one dares to do so. I do not want to know you any more . . . or no . . . wait a bit. . . ."

Aline rushed to the toilet table, took a pocket-book out of the drawer, and with trembling fingers drew from it some banknotes, which she flung towards Gourakin.

The money fell on the table and on the floor at his feet.

"Here is Nathalie's money . . ." cried Aline brokenly, stifling the rising tears. "You may take it; I do not sell my conscience. And this . . . and this. . . . You may take all. . . . I do not want anything if you dare to suspect me. . . ."

Hat-boxes were now flung at Michail, and their contents fell out, disclosing hats, ribbons, laces. Aline was in a wild frenzy. She opened the wardrobe and, catching at the dresses, she threw them at him. Tears were running down her pale cheeks, loud sobs were bursting from her throat, her long hair was ruffled and hung round her face.

"Alexandra Vassilievna, for God's sake, listen. Pardon me if I have been mistaken. . . . By God, I did not know . . . I did not want . . . What is it to me that my wife lent you money? I did not think that you . . ."

"That is a lie! You did think that Nathalie paid me to play the spy. It is mean and vile to insult me like that. I do not want to know you. . . . I curse these theatricals. I will not, I do not want to take part in them . . . for nothing in the world . . . not for millions! . . . I will leave with the evening train. . . ."

Michail did not know what to do. Aline would not let him say a word. She lay on the sofa, her face buried in the cushions, and cried unrestrainedly. In vain Gourakin tried to calm her. He endeavoured to take her hand, but she pulled it away, and only cried more bitterly than ever.

"You cannot go away, Alexandra Vassilievna—it is impossible. Everything is arranged. . . . Tchagin will go mad, the Duchess will be displeased."

"To the devil with all your Tchagins and Duchesses! . . . I do not want anyone. . . . I will go away. . . ."

Gourakin felt quite at a loss. He looked at the sobbing Aline in silence. She lay on the low sofa, her golden hair falling on the carpet, the supple body trembling with the sobs. Suddenly she raised her head. Her face showed her grief and looked very beautiful.

"Go away. . . . Do not dare to remain here . . ." she said through her tears, and buried her face in the cushions again.

"How is it I never noticed how beautiful and interesting she is?" thought Michail, carefully moving along the carpet so as not to tread on the hats, dresses, feathers, laces lying about. He decided to go straight to Tchagin, knowing that only he, with his gentle nature and kind heart, would be able to persuade Aline. When Gourakin left her she continued to lie as she was in the same attitude of hopeless despair. Bitter and sad thoughts chased one another. In the morning it had seemed to her that she was standing on the threshold of a new and happy life, in which she saw the face of the dashing General; now everything looked dark, grey and hopelessly sad. In the evening she would have to leave this noisy, lively town and return again to the remote village, to read the Lives of the Saints to her old and deaf aunt, to see to the closing of all the doors and shutters after their early supper, to count the eggs, and deal out the butter and cream. . . . Oh, how horrid to remember all that, and how soon all this would be a dismal reality, in which there would be no place for the smiling image of coquettish Aline in a dress of mauve colour with bare shoulders and delicate bare arms! No place either for the elegant Prince Bibiche, with the family ring on his handsome hand and his brilliant French accent. . . . And no hope that these charming pictures will ever return to her, become habitual owing to the will of capricious fortune. . . . She will have to leave with the evening train, just when such happy days of success were before her! Her part, so coquettish and provoking! . . . The tears flowed again. Aline heard how someone knocked twice at her door, how it opened slowly, and someone entered, but she remained lying still. Tchagin stood in the doorway with his hat in his hand and peered

through his pince-nez at the dresses, hats and money scattered on the floor.

"May I come in, Alexandra Vassilievna? I must see you," he said, not noticing that Aline was lying on the sofa.

"Come in . . . but chaos is reigning here," she answered in a tired voice, raising her head from the cushions and pushing back the ruffled locks of hair.

"*Chère petite* Suzanne, in what a state I find you!" said Tchagin, kindly extending his hand and calling her by the name she bore in the part she was to act. "Should such clear blue eyes ever shed tears! And the little hands are quite cold. Come now, think of me as a friend. Let me sit near you here. I have come to you in Gourakin's name."

"Do not speak of him. He is a bad man."

"Believe me, I know him from childhood; he has an excellent heart. He told me all, and is now ready to ask your forgiveness on his knees. He just now confessed to me that he did not know or understand you until to-day. Forgive him. He is in despair for having insulted you, and implores you not to go away, to change nothing, and not deprive us of your talent and your sweet company, and he says that if you order him to do so, he will leave for Moscow this very day."

"Why should he go away? Let him amuse himself. I do not want to be in anyone's way. I am going away.... I have decided. . . ."

Tchagin continued to soothe and persuade her until Aline was able to listen to him calmly. His gentle manner and kind hearty words at last obtained from Aline the permission for Gourakin to come to her to explain his conduct, and she promised not to leave the town. While giving the promise she thought of Prince Bibiche's smiling eyes, and her heart felt lighter. With Tchagin's help she picked up all her scattered wardrobe and the money and bid him adieu with a smile on her lips.

"You have a good nature," said Tchagin, kissing her hand. "You do not nurse your grievance, and pass soon from sorrow to joy."

Aline did not make any calls. She had a slight headache, and lay down to rest until it would be time to go to Garina's dinner.

Gourakin arrived when she was ready to start. Her eyes were burning from the tears they had shed, her dress suited her delicate skin and golden hair to perfection. Glancing from under her eyebrows at Gourakin as he entered the room, she tried to hide a smile. She wanted him to feel that he had wronged her. Michail proceeded to give his explanations with evident contrition. Aline stood before a tall mirror, and was more interested in admiring her own reflection than in listening to what he was saying.

"Well, God forgive you, wicked man! I pardon you, but remember that no one ever hurt me as you did."

"Alexandra Vassilievna, *ma belle* Suzanne, I repent sincerely. I was such a fool as to think that out of friendship to Nathalie you were capable of . . ."

"A meanness! Oh, how little you know me! I want to live, do you understand, to live, a short but brilliant life, and nothing else is of any importance to me. To spy upon you? Ha, ha, ha! Nathalie implored me to make you in love with myself, and thus guarantee her peace of mind, and I quite forgot about you."

"I can only say to that that Nathalie's plan was much more dangerous than my small peccadilloes." Gourakin came quite close to Aline, and his admiring glance seemed to embrace her bare shoulders. "If I were to fall in love with you, then most certainly you would have to turn traitress in respect to Nathalie."

"You are mad, really! What new insult is this?"

Aline turned to Gourakin and looked at him with laughing eyes.

"Without any doubt, *petite* Suzanne. It sounds incredible, but only to-day for the first time I noticed how charming you are."

"An hysterical woman. Please do not forget that is what you called me."

"Yes, you are hysterical. Would a normal woman ever lose her self-possession to such a degree as to fling at me

all the contents of her wardrobe, hat-boxes, bags, and even her pocket-book? *C'était un tableau!*"

The remembrance of that scene called forth a burst of irrepressible laughter. The quarrel was forgotten, and they went off together to Garina's dinner.

"Again Michail Gourakin?" whispered Prince Bibiche reproachfully, kissing Aline's hand when she entered the drawing-room accompanied by Michail. "I am beginning to be jealous."

The dinner was served for a small number of guests, but it was very animated. Besides the hostess and Aline there was only one other lady, a celebrated operetta actress with whom all the brilliant youth of Petersburg were in love. Very piquante, lively and witty, the Parisian artist knew how to behave in a society drawing-room as well as she knew how to be daring on the stage. After the dinner the ladies curled themselves up on the sofa and the men disposed themselves at their feet on the rugs and furs, smoking their cigars and drinking champagne. Jokes, laughter and witticisms went on gaily. Nellie Ivanovna, half reclining on a sofa, with her hands crossed behind her head and her small feet stretched out, began to sing a tsigane romance. Aline at once ran to the piano and caught up the duet: "And I love you so . . . and I fear you so. . . . Must be I saw you first in an untoward hour . . ." she sang, and in the last notes something passionate seemed to vibrate as if from the very depths of her soul.

"Sing something for me alone, please," asked Prince Bibiche, while the others were applauding and talking loudly.

Aline ran her fingers over the keys and struck a few preparatory chords.

". . . I remember a marvellous moment . . ." she began without looking at anyone, but the sounds flowed with so much feeling that all understood she was singing for someone. "In solitude, in the darkness of confinement, my days were slowly passing. . . ." The sounds flowed on sad and soft, and suddenly they rang out bright and solemn. Aline's eyes, sparkling and moist, were turned towards

Prince Bibiche: ". . . And then came the awakening, and for me were revived again faith in Divine Power, and inspiration, and life, and tears, and . . . love. . . ." Aline rose from the piano as if she did not know where she was. Prince Bibiche was watching her with a strange look in the eyes. Michail was very much excited, and seemed taken up with the Parisian diva. At eleven o'clock three troikas drove up to the door. The gay company departed for the Islands, calling by the way for Baroness Shellman, Mishka Kovalevsky, and Prince Vassilkoff. Lumps of frozen snow falling into the sleighs touched the heated faces; the frosty wind gave a red glow to the cheeks. Laughter, jokes, ardent glances, secret pressure of hands. . . . The troikas dashed past lantern posts, solitary cabmen drowsing on their seats, belated passengers on the quay . . . then small wooden houses, country seats closed up for the winter, shrubs and trees covered with snow, and the untrodden paths in the wood. All round silence and night. They reached the tsiganes' restaurant. The choir assembled in a small room; champagne and oysters were served on a table. The dark and swarthy tsigane women sat in a row, the men standing behind them. The strings of the guitars rang forth, and the guttural sounds of the tsigane songs seemed to add to the animation and general excitement. Michail sat between Aline and Baroness Shellman. Aline took no notice of him. Prince Bibiche did not leave her side, and kept whispering to her words of love.

"On the way back Mishka Kovalevsky is going with the Baroness, and I will go in the same troika as you, *petite* Suzanne," Aline suddenly heard a whisper in her ear.

"I am going with the Prince," she replied absently.

"One does not interfere with the other. There is plenty of place in the sleigh. He is paying you too much attention."

"All the better."

"I do not like it."

"I do!"

Aline laughed, flashed a look at Michail out of the corners

of her eyes, and turned away to resume her conversation with the Prince.

The gay and noisy company left the restaurant long past midnight; the men helped the ladies with their furs, the troikas ringing their bells at the door. Mishka Kovalevsky exchanged a few whispered words with Gourakin, opened wide the doors, and exclaiming, "The Rape of the Sabines!" caught up within his muscular arms Baroness Shellman, and amid shouts of approval carried her off to the sleigh. At the same moment Michail, lifting Aline in his giant clasp, ran down the steps and bore her towards the other troika. Prince Bibiche and Tchagin rushed after him. Jumping into the sleigh as it was going full speed, they tore madly after the troika which was carrying away the Baroness, Kovalevsky and Matlin. Michail managed to get his hand into Aline's muff unperceived, and each time that Prince Bibiche bent towards her to whisper into her ear, he squeezed her fingers until they ached. In vain she tried to free her hand. All the way Prince Bibiche kept telling her how she had turned his head, and that he was completely in her power, and all the way Michail hurt her hand and gazed at her in silence from under the vizor of his cap with angry and excited eyes.

VIII

THE rehearsals followed one another. Three *tableaux vivants* had been added to the play, and the number of the actors had increased, so that each time the rehearsals became more and more lively. The Duchess seemed transfigured, and was present at every one; happiness and joy seemed to emanate from her, and her presence served to bring new animation. An atmosphere of love seemed to reign wherever the company of actors and actresses were assembled. The last rehearsal was to take place at the palace of the Duchess. A magnificent stage was erected in one of the large *salons*. Michail and Aline were the best actors; Michail, Aline's lover in the play, was beginning to continue his rôle when off the stage. Prince Bibiche was jealous, and in order not to leave Aline alone with him took upon himself the duties of stage-manager. Aline, wishing to bring the Prince to a serious declaration of his love, teased him by slightly encouraging Gourakin. Two days before the play Michail received a letter from his wife, in which she informed him that she would not be able to come, as their little boy was ailing; he was cutting his teeth, and she did not want to leave him in the hands of his nurse. On receiving the letter Michail went to his grandmother, Mme. Gourakina. Since his marriage neither his grandmother nor his father had ever mentioned his wife's name. Old Mme. Gourakina loved her grandson as much as ever, and in her prayers she always remembered his children, but she would never listen to anything about Nathalie, and could not forgive her for the past. Her daughter Marie was of too kind-hearted a nature, and she loved her nephew too well, to remain a stranger to his life. She had long ago forgiven Nathalie, and if in accordance

with her mother's will she did not see her, she was nevertheless deeply interested in all that concerned her nephew's family life. Without seeing her she dearly loved little Mimi, and often sent her toys unknown to Mme. Gourakina. During his present stay Michail used, as in the old days, to run into Marie's room before leaving the house, and there pour out frankly into her ear all that was troubling or pleasing him. Marie understood that the intensely jealous nature of Nathalie was embittering her nephew's life, and that a wife with a better balanced mind and calmer nature could both find and give him perfect happiness. Not wishing to add fuel to the fire, Marie as well as she could reasoned with and tried to soothe Michail, advising him not to give his wife cause for jealousy. But even while pronouncing these words Marie knew that they were useless; she understood that Michail was too young for family life, that his impulsive nature presented but a poor guarantee for Nathalie's peace of mind.

Old Mme. Gourakina and Marie were very much interested in the forthcoming theatricals, but there was no question of Marie going to see the play, as the old lady would not admit the idea that her daughter could be placed in an awkward position in meeting Nathalie.

Michail went straight to the old lady's apartments; he found her in the small drawing-room reclining on a long chair, her feet wrapped in a rug.

Opposite to her sat Prince Alexei Vassilievitch. Afternoon tea had been served on a small table. Mme. Gourakina looked much older than she did two years ago. Although she still kept her dignified bearing and proud look, her face had a yellow colour, new wrinkles were appearing, she was often ailing, prayed more, and frequently remained buried in thought.

"Good-day, my boy, I am glad to see you," said she with a fond caress to her grandson. "Have some tea? I am not quite well . . . feverish, and I passed a bad night. I am thankful to dear Prince Alexei Vassilievitch that he comes to see me."

"*Bonjour*, Michail. Are you coming from a rehearsal,

or going to one? I hear you are developing a great histrionic talent. A brilliant success. All the ladies tearing you to pieces," said Prince Alexei with a smile.

"I think he is willing to do that himself. To think that he is the father of a family!" and Mme. Gourakina shook her head in mild reproof.

Michail seemed to bring with him a ray of youth and light-heartedness. Clinking his spurs and noisily dragging a chair to the table, he beamed on his grandmother and the Prince with the careless happy smile of youth. Mme. Gourakina gazed on him with love and admiration shining in her eyes.

"Do not you find, Prince Alexei, that he is becoming too much of a dandy?" she said, laying her hand caressingly on her grandson's sleeve. "What scent are you using? It has a delicate perfume. How much does it cost? Six roubles? You spend six roubles for scent? But that is madness, dear child. I never, even when I was young, allowed myself to spend as much. From where do you take the money to pay such expenses?"

"You yourself, *grand'maman*, gave me the money; I am just spending it," laughed Michail.

"I did not give you the money to buy scent, my boy."

"Excuse me, *grand'maman*, I promise you to use only eau-de-Cologne in future. Do not be angry."

"Well, well. . . . Drink your tea and pour out another glass for the Prince."

"I have just received a letter from Moscow," said Michail, addressing himself to the Prince alone. "My little son is cutting his teeth and feeling out of sorts, so that no one is coming from over there to the play."

Mme. Gourakina seemed not to hear what her grandson was saying; she was arranging the rug about her knees.

"I have brought a ticket in the first row for Aunt Marie. I hope, *grand'maman*, that you will have nothing against her going."

"If Marie wishes it, let her go. I do not know, however, what she has to wear. One must be *en grande tenue* for this play."

"Yes, certainly," affirmed the Prince. "The whole Court will be there; the company will be in full dress."

Soon after that Marie came in from her walk. She was not much changed after two years, in her dark dress with batiste collar and cuffs, her hair parted in the middle and smoothly drawn back in a large coil at the back of her head. She extended her hand in hearty greeting to Prince Alexei, whom she liked and pitied very much, embraced her nephew, and asked her mother with loving concern how she was feeling.

Her mother gave her the ticket for the play that Michail had brought, and advised her to lose no time in seeing about a dress for the evening. Marie, very much surprised at her mother's consent, at first refused to go, but soon ceded to Michail's prayers.

"Have you heard," said the Prince to Mme. Gourakina, "that my Princess is going to remove to Moscow? She finds that there is so much to do with the convent that she must be there herself. I am dissuading her, but as it is Father Fedor who is influencing her, the question is now finally decided."

At the mention of Father Fedor's name old Gourakina's face wore its most austere expression: "How tactless he is, the dear Prince!" she thought.

"Well," she said aloud, "if the Princess finds consolation in this work, which demands great care and attention, she had certainly better dwell near the convent."

"Maybe she will yet take the veil herself," continued the Prince. "She has always been peculiar, and if she gets something into her head, it is quite impossible to dissuade her."

"The best thing is to let her do as she likes."

"Certainly, it is not my business to prevent her," answered Prince Alexei, and rose to say good-bye.

He carried off Michail with him to dinner, after which they were to go on to the palace for the rehearsal. After the latter, the Prince intended to go to the ballet to take Petrova as usual to supper at Dussaux's. He wanted to give her pleasure, and asked Michail to invite a few

more friends to come there too and join them, as if accidentally.

Prince Alexei conducted Michail to his study to show him some photographs of his racers which he had just received.

After looking at them Michail turned his attention to the writing-table, where he discovered a new series of photographs of Petrova in various attitudes.

"Listen, my boy," said the Prince. "Tikhon has just told me that the Princess is going to have company in her apartments to-night. Now you try to find some excuse for both of us, in case we shall be expected to be there. Say whatever you like, but find some excuse; I hate to tell stories, and I never know how to do it, and the Princess has become most impossibly irritable with all her saintly worries; it's simply impossible to speak with her. Anyhow, I prefer to fail to gratify her, who never was pleased with anything in all her life, than to grieve a woman who is fond of me. . . . How she dances! In these years she has acquired such lightness, such a plastic grace! She dances the Catchucha . . . like a goddess. I tell you, it is enough to turn any head. *Quelle jambe! Quelle précision!* You are a family man now, you can understand many things. . . . The Princess, with all her qualities of a good wife, always had an unbearable temper, and when one gets old, one cannot be without a cosy home, without a loving woman's heart. This is my house, but there is my home, and I will tell you frankly, it will be better for both of us if the Princess goes to Moscow. I do not believe in all these rites and prayers of hers; it is just pride and hypocrisy, but let her go."

The Prince took up a new cigarette and, closing the door of the study, continued in a slightly lowered voice:

"Do you remember Olga Onisimovna, the head of the school? It appears she is such an accursed hag that hanging is too good for her. I have provided for all her daughters and arranged for their education at the cost of the Government, and it appears that she has been carrying such tales about me that the devil would break his leg in

extricating himself. *Une triple canaille!* She manages to know everything, and reports at once to the Princess. How do you like that? I have been through such scenes here lately, enough to make a man run away from home."

The Prince began to pace the room in agitation.

"Serguei takes his mother's part. He has a very difficult temper. He quarrels with everyone. As you see, my boy, fate has not been very kind to me. The Court is also rather cold towards me, but that does not trouble me much; in declining years one cares less for all those grandeurs, and I never was ambitious, even in my youth. No, my dear, the love of a woman is a great blessing; it is the best thing on earth. Do you agree with me?"

"You are right, uncle."

"Ah, Michail, you are young yet, and you will have to sow many wild oats before you learn to appreciate woman. And how is Nathalie?'"

"Nathalie is just the same," smiled Michail.

"I heard that. They say she is getting prettier, she loves you as much as ever, and is as jealous as she was. That is not right. And how are you with your father? A stubborn old man; however, I can tell you that he has left everything to you in his will. He is still angry with you for your marriage; during his last visit here he complained to me that he would like to see his grandchildren, but he cannot. Yes, there is a cankerworm in every family. However, let us go; dinner will soon be announced."

At dinner there was only the chief steward of the princely estates. The Princess, grown very fat, with a certain affectation in the ultra-simplicity of her attire, her spare hair in a tight knot at the top of her head, discoursed during the whole dinner on matters concerning the estates and the expenses inherent on the building of her convent. In her voice the old harsh, authoritative tones were heard still more, her irritability had increased with age and had laid a mark on her homely face.

"We see you very little," said she, addressing Michail. "I only hear of your successes in society. At your age the world can still amuse you, but when you get older you will

be glad to escape from it. . . . And so you find, August Lvovitch, that the stud could bring in more profit? The Prince, however, desires to suspend it altogether. You hear, Alexei?"

"I hear, I hear. Up to now the stud has been a dead loss," said the Prince indifferently.

"You would be pleased perhaps, Your Excellency, to look through the estimates; I have brought them. . . ."

"Good heavens, what a dull dinner!" thought Michail, and regretted that he had been persuaded to come.

"Will you not come to my apartments after ten o'clock? I have some people coming. Maybe in your honour Prince Alexei Vassilievitch will show himself to my guests," said the Princess to Michail when he was making his adieux after dinner.

Michail assured her that neither he nor Prince Alexei would be free before two hours past midnight, as . . . and here he poured out such a stream of excuses that the Prince hastened to leave the room.

"Well, my friend, I see that you are past master in the art of finding excuses. And I have now been learning it twenty-five years, and still have not acquired it. . . ."

"Say, please, have you heard the great news about Volynsky?" asked the Prince when they entered the carriage to go to the palace of the Duchess for the rehearsal.

"I have heard of it. Do you think it is true?"

"It looks like it, it looks very much like it. They say that after Easter they are going abroad together. He has good taste, Volynsky; for a wife he had Nathalie, for a lover he has the Duchess."

IX

THE performance held in the Duchess's palace for the benefit of the poor of the town was very brilliant. The whole Court was present, the receipts were more than could be expected, the performers had a great success. Most of the applause fell to the share of Aline and her partner, Michail. Aline in her rôle of *grande coquette* was irresistibly charming; her head was quite turned by the praises, applause, and the rapturous kisses rained on her little hands. After the theatre there was a ball. The Duchess, resplendent in her happiness and her diamonds, Garina, Baroness Shellman, and Aline were the belles of the ball, with their beauty and dresses. Each of them had a brilliant cavalier, and the Duchess with Volynsky, Garina with the Duke Vladimir, Baroness Shellman with Michail, and Aline with Prince Bibiche were the centres round which were grouped attention, curiosity, and conjectures. Michail, wishing to excite Aline's jealousy, did not move from the Baroness's side, but Aline was utterly absorbed in her own cavalier, and did not pay any attention to anyone else. Prince Bibiche was imploring her not to return to Moscow, to stay the Easter holidays in Petersburg; Aline was consenting to everything, although she did not know at the time how she would be able to arrange it, as her money was spent, and she only had just enough to take her home. She did not want to spoil her impressions of the ball, and laid all her cares aside until the next day, to prolong the happy feeling of her own and the Prince's love. She hoped that Prince Bibiche would pass from admiration to love, and she was happy to listen to his tender entreaties not to go away, not to destroy the enchantment.

Meantime Prince Alexei Vassilievitch, immediately after

the performance, was carefully pushing his way through the brilliant crowd, replying to many respectful bows, greetings, and handshakes, and trying to espy somewhere the modest figure of Marie Gourakina. His aide-de-camp had just respectfully handed him a note from the Princess: "Old Gourakina is taken ill; let Marie come home at once."

Marie, swept aside by the crowd, was standing in a corner of the ball-room and watching Michail, who was whispering something to the Baroness, so that she did not at once see Prince Alexei, who was making signs to her from afar. He gave her his wife's note and proposed to call her nephew, but Marie asked him not to spoil his pleasure. With a changed face Marie took the Prince's arm and hastened to leave the ball. The Prince ordered his carriage to be brought round and went with her.

After her daughter's departure old Gourakina suddenly felt worse, and leaving the drawing-room, where for the last two days she had been half lying on her long chair, she went to her bedroom and lay down. About midnight she became feverish and delirious. Miss Jones sent for the doctor, who found his patient in a dangerous state. Miss Jones had then sent word to Prince Alexei's house. When Marie entered her mother's bedroom Miss Jones was standing near the bed and holding an ice-bag to her mother's forehead. She laid her finger on her lips to show that the patient was sleeping. Marie came up softly and bent over her mother; the old woman was breathing heavily and in gasps; her hot hand lay above the counterpane, and the fingers were moving convulsively and unceasingly. Marie, her eyes full of tears, passed into her own room to divest herself of her ball-dress. Prince Alexei exchanged a few words with the old grey-haired family practitioner, Karl Ivanovitch Lindes, who had attended the Gourakins for over twenty-five years.

"Science cannot work miracles," he was saying, shaking his old head, with his long and reddish nose. "Advanced age and very weak heart."

Prince Alexei and the doctor left at five in the morning. Marie had persuaded Miss Jones to lie down, but she

herself would not quit her mother for an instant. Mme. Gourakina was still lying in the same immovable condition. By the morning the delirium left her, but the eyes were closed; the fever had abated, the face was drawn and of a greyish pallor; on the temples and the cheeks were deep hollows. Weak moans issued from the half open, dry lips, together with the breath.

"Mamma, dearest, darling mamma, do you hear me? I am here, I am with you . . ." Marie kept asking softly, stroking her mother's hand, but the old woman lay as immovable as before, and Marie, driving back her tears, pressing her handkerchief to her lips to keep back the sobs, with a heavy sigh resumed her seat at the head of the bed, and without taking her eyes off her mother's face watched her breath, her smallest movement.

The doctor arrived in the morning; he shook his head, prescribed new medicines, said the patient was not to be disturbed, and promised to come again in three hours. Michail came after him. Stepping softly, and trying not to make a noise with his spurs, he came to his grandmother's bed and, bending down, lightly laid his lips on the strangely pale plump hand.

"Mishenka! . . . You? . . ."

The old woman suddenly opened her eyes, and with an evident effort lifted her hand and laid it on her grandson's head.

"I have been waiting for you and Marie. . . . Why is she not here?" she said in a weak voice, without taking her intent gaze off the face of her grandson, who had sunk down on his knees beside her.

"Mamma, I am here. . . . I have been here all the time; I have not left you for a single second. . . . Look at me . . . darling mamma. . . ."

Tears were streaming from Marie's eyes. She knelt down beside Michail and carefully transferred her mother's hand to her own head. Gourakina turned her gaze slowly on Marie's face, and it stopped there with the same dreadful intensity.

"I see you now, my dear. . . . Don't cry. . . . You

must not. . . . I am very ill . . but I am calm. . . . Call the father-confessor. . . . I am ready. . . ."

The old woman closed her lips and was silent. It seemed she was asleep. Michail sent for the priest and sat down near the bed with Marie. About half an hour passed.

"Are you here?" asked Gourakina in a scarcely audible voice, and moved her hand weakly towards them. "Do not go away, stay with me . . ." she whispered.

Hardly able to keep back her sobs, Marie laid her forehead on her mother's hand, which Michail took into both his. When the father-confessor arrived, the old woman asked them to lift her higher on the pillows. She confessed her sins and received the holy sacrament in full consciousness. Her strength was failing visibly. The face was hardly recognizable; a vague but dread shadow enveloped the features. The room was quite still. Prince Alexei came and Baroness Kern; they stood a few minutes in silence by the bed of the dying woman, exchanged a sorrowful look with the grief-stricken Marie, and went out, as silently, from the room where one seemed to hear the rustle of death's wings. After confession the sick woman lay without movement, only her shoulders and head seemed to sink deeper into the high-piled pillows. When it began to get dark Marie lit the candles at the other end of the room, and, coming up to her mother's bed, softly laid her lips on her hair. The sick woman suddenly opened her eyes and looked into her daughter's eyes with a clear gaze.

"Come nearer . . . Marie . . . Mishenka. . . . I bless thee and thee in the name of our Lord. . . . Misha . . . give my blessing to your father and take care . . . of my . . . my . . ." her tongue refused to obey. The sick woman turned her eyes towards her daughter and repeated again, "Take care . . . of her. . . ." With a great effort she made the sign of the cross over them, closed her eyes for a moment and added lower still and in a whisper: "You, darling, be a comfort to him. . . . Our . . . Fa . . . Father . . ." Her lips babbled incoherently.

Michail understood the wish of the dying woman, and, kneeling down, began to read the Lord's Prayer in a clear,

distinct voice. Marie lit last year's Passion-week candle before the large ikon-case standing in the corner opposite to the dying woman and repeated the words of the prayer with her nephew. In the doorway stood the tall figure of Miss Jones. Moving her lips in her usual fashion, she knelt down on the threshold, fearing to disturb the peace of death, and with eyes full of tears she gazed on the hardly-to-be-recognized features of the departing one, thanking her inwardly for the peaceful home that she had given her solitary old age. Without a moan, without suffering, the old lady quietly passed away, respected by all and deeply loved by her family. Sorrowful tears ran down her daughter's cheeks, but with neither sob nor moan did she disturb the peace of her dying mother. Michail's eyes were also full of tears. When all was over, he carefully led Marie to her room, made her lie down, and stayed by her side until, wearied out by her sleepless night and her tears, she fell asleep.

X

After the funeral Michail began to prepare for his departure for Moscow. Nathalie was insistently calling him home in her letters, in which signs of irritation were beginning to be felt. Gourakin did not wish to forsake his grief-stricken aunt, but his leave was up and he could not remain longer. It was decided that Marie would go to live in Moscow in the autumn to be nearer to her nephew. She feared the idea of a solitary life, and the last words of her dying mother to her daughter and grandson were understood by them as her wish that they would be near to each other. Michail decided that his beloved aunt was to live with them, but he did not say anything, desiring that Nathalie would be the first to mention it to Marie. Before his departure he called on Aline and found her in a strangely excited state. She talked very much, laughed suddenly, then became thoughtful, and seemed absent-minded.

"What is the matter with you, *petite* Suzanne?" asked Gourakin.

Aline had been so charming in her rôle that she was often called by everyone "*petite* Suzanne" now.

"I do not recognize you to-day, and I cannot make out whether you are joyful or sorrowful."

"There is nothing the matter with me. I am the same as usual. Or no. . . . You have guessed: something has happened to me. The worst is that in such moments I am quite alone, I have no one to speak to, no one to turn to, to ask advice of. . . ."

Aline put her hands behind her head, a customary gesture of hers.

"And Prince Bibiche? He is at your feet," said Gourakin in a mocking voice.

"Leave the Prince alone. At this moment I am in need

of someone else, of a kind, understanding friend. Listen, Michail Vladimirovitch; why are you angry with me? You have a kind heart, and you must understand me; even if I were not in love with the Prince I could not, I would not, dare to fall in love with you. We were friends, Nathalie and I; we dreamed of our future together, we made such beautiful plans, we came out together. Do you think I could steal even a bit of her happiness? She loves you to adoration, she is sick with love for you. To deceive her with you—it would be meanness on my part. Say that I am right."

"Oh, that certainly; if you take such a soul-saving standpoint then there is no outlet; on your part it would be meanness, on mine it would be baseness. Nathalie is a saint, and I am a monster."

"You are not a monster at all, but the nicest of men. But do not let us speak of this any more; I repeat to you that I must have someone this moment to relieve my mind. Be my friend and remember that I may be a devoted and faithful friend to you. Life is long. . . . Who knows what is awaiting each one of us? . . ." added Aline sorrowfully.

"Prince Bibiche is certainly awaiting you. . . . Well, forgive me, forgive me—I was joking. I see that you are really in trouble. What could have happened? You need not be afraid of trusting me, *petite* Suzanne; I will not betray you."

"I do trust you; I know you are a nice man. Ah, how difficult it is for me to tell you! . . . You know the beginning. I am speaking of our meeting with the Prince, of how I am not only in love with him, but I love him, you understand—I love him so that I cannot think of life without the possibility of seeing or hearing him. He is imploring me to stay till the spring, and even for me it seems monstrous to go away. And where to? To that disgusting place 'Motygi,' to my old foolish aunt, to the far-off village, to the cows and hens? . . . No, no! I'd rather die, be drowned. . . . I cannot bear it any more. . . . Anything, but not Motygi. . . ."

"Certainly Prince Bibiche is better than Motygi," said Gourakin with a sly smile.

"Yes, you may well smile, because you have no idea of what it is to live that dull animal life with the capricious old woman. I have decided not to go away, to stay here, to make the Prince understand that I love him seriously, for all my life. I did not know to whom to turn for help; it is no secret to you that my means are very small. I wrote all frankly to Nathalie, asking her to get me some money. This morning I at last got her answer. Read it and tell me, what am I to do? My thoughts are all in a maze, I am simply losing my wits!" Aline gave Gourakin his wife's letter. "Read it attentively, and if you know anything be frank. It is better to know the truth than to be in the dark."

"My Dear Aline,

"Your letter is simply the raving of an unsound mind. Michail is right: you are an hysterical woman. I never thought you could fall in love so rapidly. Prince Bibiche is undoubtedly very interesting, and is known to all Petersburg as a lover of women. Believe me, he has paid his attentions to all the interesting women. But I assure you he never thinks of marriage. The beautiful Gontcharova was madly in love with him when she was not married. She was an excellent *parti* for him, and her parents greatly desired the match. He went off abroad. Princess Valitzkaia wanted a divorce from her husband for his sake—he suddenly went off to his estates. Do not trust him, be prudent, dearest Aline. Prince Bibiche likes women for his own amusement, and he remains quite cold in view of the sufferings that his amusement causes women's hearts. I am sending you the money, but I implore you once more not to lose your head. I have nothing to say of myself; I am in tortures and quite ill since Michail is so far away.

"Yours,

"Nathalie."

Gourakin read the letter and handed it to Aline.

"What do you say?" she asked with anxiety.

"Nathalie is right; I do not wish to deceive you. Maybe the Prince is very much in love with you, but I have often heard him say that he is against marriage, and in general he is a man whose love affairs are not to be taken seriously."

"I shall go mad, quite mad. . . . Yesterday only he said to me—and it is all untrue, all lies. . . . No, I can't live so. . . . It is above my strength. . . ."

Aline, pressing her hands to her temples, moved about the room restlessly.

"But we may be mistaken in this case," Gourakin hastened to reassure her. "Perhaps a change has come over him. It may be. Do not despair, *petite* Suzanne; think over your position and act prudently."

"Ah, what can I do? I have no will now; I have given myself up to his fascination, I believed so implicitly all that he told me."

Aline, covering her face with her hands, burst into tears.

"But perhaps he was not lying. Come, control yourself, make him explain himself seriously and frankly. When will you see him?"

"We have agreed to dine together at Dussaux's. . . . But I will not go . . . I cannot see him now."

"On the contrary, go, be as charming as usual, and make him speak definitely. In love, frankness is indispensable. Begin by that."

"Ah, I know nothing, nothing at all now. . . . For God's sake, tell me only one thing, but tell the truth: do you consider the Prince a bad man?"

"Certainly not! He is the nicest man, but a great coxcomb, dreadfully spoilt by women, and he loves his freedom. You ought not to have taken my words so tragically. Take him well in hand; maybe he will give in—I gave in," said Michail with a smile.

"If you were as old as the Prince is now, then most certainly Nathalie would not have succeeded in depriving you of your liberty."

"I think you are right, and I confess that I cannot but regret it."

"Yes, because Nathalie is so unreasonably jealous. As to myself, you will not believe how pliable I can be in family life, how I respect a man's freedom. . . . The Prince might be so happy with me! . . ."

Michail said good-bye to Aline and persuaded her not to put off her explanation with the Prince. He admired her very much, and in his heart of hearts he hoped that she would be disenchanted and return to Moscow.

On remaining alone, Aline tried several times to write a letter to the Prince, but each time that she began she tore up what she had written and began again. Not able to find the exact words to express her anxious frame of mind, Aline left the writing-table in vexation. Then she decided not to write to the Prince, but when he would call for her to send to tell him that she was unwell, and would not go to dinner to Dussaux's. But after a while, about half an hour before the moment appointed for their meeting, Aline was frightened at her decision. Not to see the Prince for a whole day, not to speak to him, seemed so cruel to her that she began to dress in a fever of haste, thinking of the impending explanation. Punctual to the minute, Prince Bibiche sent word that he was there and was waiting for her. Never did he seem so handsome to Aline as when she saw him in the hall waiting for her as she was coming down. He was smiling, and ascended several steps to meet her.

"*Quel chic épatant!* Ravishing as ever!" said he with a look at her plush cloak and its bright-coloured lining. At the door stood the Prince's elegant brougham with a pair of black horses. As soon as they had started the Prince took possession of Aline's hand.

"All last night I was drinking to your health. What have you done with me? I cannot sleep at all. I had a mad longing at two o'clock to come to you, wake you up and carry you off somewhere, but I controlled myself and went to Borel's instead. But I did not forget you a single moment. . . . And you, *petite* Suzanne, did you think of me?"

'Oh, I have been thinking too much, too much . . and I have decided to let you know all my thoughts."

"Very well, I am all attention."

"No, not at once. At dinner it will be more cosy, and with a glass of champagne I will be more eloquent."

"I submit to your will and I am entirely in your power," answered Prince Bibiche, gazing at Aline with eyes in which she could feel the strength and recognition of her own, not another's, power.

"After dinner we shall go for a drive to the Islands," said Prince Bibiche, entering a private room of the restaurant and helping Aline to take off her cloak. "I told the coachman to come for us with the sleigh and to bring a rug for you. Soon the snow will thaw and the road will be spoilt. Are you agreed?"

"That will depend on our conversation, *Prince charmant.* We will either go to the Islands or you will take me home, and then . . . then I will return to Moscow to-morrow. . . ."

"You, to Moscow? To-morrow, even? What an idea! Why should you go to Moscow? That will not be . . ."

"But perhaps it will be . . ." Aline sighed softly.

"Do not make me sad . . . why? I adore you so, I would do anything to please you," said the Prince, while placing Aline on the sofa before the table and sitting down himself on a chair. When the dinner was over and the servant, having filled their glasses with champagne, went out, the Prince moved nearer to Aline and looked straight into her eyes.

"To-day there is something uncannily fascinating in you. What eyes you have! You wanted to tell me something. I am all attention. I will catch each word of yours and will not cease to admire you. . . . May I smoke?"

The Prince got his cigarette-case, and carefully took out a cigarette with his white, well-cared-for fingers with the rosy nails, then closed the case, put it away into his pocket, lit the cigarette, and waving the smoke away from Aline with his hand, leaned his arm on the table and with a smile in his eyes looked at her.

"Prince, dear Prince, tell me the truth. Do you love me very much?" began Aline with sudden determination.

"Do I love you? I adore you."

"But how, how do you love me?"

"*Ma foi!* I love you very much. . . . I am ready to do anything to win your love in return."

"Dear Prince, but if it is only for your amusement, then I have decided to go away. . . . I cannot, cannot suffer so. . . . I love you myself, and much more than you think."

"What do you mean by 'for amusement or not for amusement'? I do not understand that at all. One loves as one loves."

"Yes, certainly one cannot force one's heart, but now I, for instance, feel that I love you for ever. Happen what may, my love for you will not cease. And you?"

"I never guarantee the future, but I must admit that I never thought of a woman so much as I have thought of you, and I cannot agree to lose you. . . . Oh no!"

Aline felt her heart beat wildly; she half closed her eyes and waited trembling what the Prince would say. The silence lasted a whole minute. Prince Bibiche took his cigarette out of his mouth, put it carefully against the edge of the ash-case, and, coming over to the sofa, sat down beside Aline and took both her hands in his.

"I understand why you have begun this conversation, *petite* Suzanne. Now hear me out. I will be frank with you; I will not say a single word that is not true. I love you, and I love you more than I have ever loved anyone until now, but I cannot make you my wife. I hate marriage, because I do not believe in it. I have so often deceived husbands with their most dear and loving wives that I have lost all respect for marriage. I know that if I marry my wife will also deceive me, as frequently other wives have deceived with me the most interesting and handsome husbands. If you cease to love me, then you will leave me, but you will not deceive me, and I will not cease to respect either you or myself. But to risk both your and my own love, to tie up our mutual freedom, and then to fear that I am deceived—no, a hundred times no! I do not

dispute the fact that maybe you, as my wife, would never deceive me, but from the moment that you would become my wife, I would cease to trust you, for the sole reason that I would constantly be thinking of the dear women who, even loving their husbands, often used to lie in my arms. You are free, beautiful, you have no children—why should you fear free love? I am a man of the world, and would never compromise you."

"I fear free love in the same way as you fear marriage," said Aline in a sinking voice.

"Were you so happy with your husband?"

"Oh no! I was very unhappy."

"Then what is the reason? I do not understand you."

"How can I be sure of my happiness if I know that at any moment you may leave me? . . ."

"And do you think that being your husband I would not leave you if I ceased to love you? *Petite* Suzanne, you know me very little. I know no other bonds except those of love. I may be a very bad husband, but I can be a very faithful friend to the woman whom I love. Ask from me whatever you like, I am ready to sacrifice anything, but not marriage. . . . If you want, I will take a year's leave, and no one will know how and where I hide with you abroad. . . . If you like, I will swear to be faithful, not to look at another woman. . . . Anything you want, *petite* Suzanne, only not marriage. If you will attain your purpose and make me marry you, then, believe me, it will be the grave of our love."

Aline was crying softly, her head on her hands, which were crossed on the table. The Prince put his arm round her waist very gently and in an insinuating whisper began telling her how he loved her and would be ready to fulfil all her wishes. Aline was crying over her crushed dreams. She knew that she could have made the Prince a happy husband; she knew that for a kind cosy home she would have given him her soul, her heart, all her thoughts. At the same time she could discern unfeigned sincere feeling in the sound of his voice. She was unable to tear from her heart the love that had sprung up in it. According to her

decision she would have to leave to-morrow and never see the Prince any more, but she foresaw that she would not have the power to part with him, and she was now weeping bitter, heavy tears.

"Am I then such a bad man? Have you then not a shadow of confidence in me, that it seems so dreadful to you to love me as a friend? . . . Dear me, do not cry so. . . . I cannot see you suffering so. . . . Well, try me in any way you like. . . . I implore you, *chère enfant*, stop crying. You upset me so, I cannot even think."

Little by little Aline became calmer. The Prince took her head tenderly and laid it on his shoulder, and began to stroke her hair with a caressing movement, and like a distant murmur she heard his words of love and tenderness. Her thoughts were in a whirl. To go back to her dreary life, to leave the Prince, she simply could not, and at the same time the fear that he would cease to love her, that he might leave her, froze her brain. There was no outlet. Nothing remained to her but to tread the path on to which her poor weak heart was calling her. She knew that struggle was useless—she could not bear separation from him. Tired out by her sorrow, she now felt herself lulled by the tender tones of his insinuating voice; his hand was touching her hair so lovingly, it was so sweet to forget all the difficulties of her dull lonely life. She thirsted for happiness. It was here, it was beckoning to her, calling to her with persuasive whispers, and she, shedding tears over her unfulfilled dream, let herself be tempted, and with a passionate impulse threw her arms round the Prince's neck.

XI

On his return to Moscow Gourakin found his wife grown thinner and her nerves very much unstrung.

She went to meet him at the station, and on seeing him arrive she threw herself on his neck, sobbing.

"No, Misha, I cannot remain so long without you," she said, fondling him. "I have worn myself out. . . . I have imagined such dreadful things. I cried nearly every day, and you were amusing yourself there and not thinking of us. Fancy only, you have been away a whole month."

"That is not so much, Nathalie!" said Michail with a good-natured smile.

"Not much for you . . . you were taken up with other things, but for me the month seemed endless. Besides, uncle has become quite strange. I do not understand what has come to the old man. He is raging and storming. Moissei Borisovitch does not know what to do with him. He says that if this is to continue, he will leave. All of a sudden he decided to make a general revision: he finds fault with all the accounts, his voice is heard scolding all over the house. It is simply impossible. He wants me to help him to check the accounts. It is such gibberish that I have an attack of migraine after two hours' work."

"How did all this begin?"

"On account of some trifle. He had noticed that there were two pounds of candles extra in one of the accounts. He dismissed the butler, fined the footman. Then he found out extra expenses in the stables, and his anger fell on the head of Moissei Borisovitch. Since then it has been going on. We have had such scenes that I wanted to telegraph to you. An insupportable old man! He makes everyone lose patience. He was sending all yesterday to know when you were coming back."

Nathalie related to her husband all that had been happening in his absence. The children were quite well. Little Mimi threw herself into his arms with a glad cry, and it was quite impossible to get her to return to the nursery. He took his little favourite on his lap, and she fell asleep so.

On the next morning Michail had just sat down to his morning coffee when Dounaisky sent for him to come immediately; he left his breakfast and hastened to him. The old man was waiting for him, standing in the middle of the room, muttering and gesticulating. Gourakin had hardly crossed the threshold than he began to scream in a squeaky, irritated voice:

"No, you just think! They are all robbing me. Swindlers! And that cursed Jew Moissei Borisovitch is with them. . . . A muddle in all the accounts. I will have them all kicked out. . . . I have ordered that all the account-books be brought here. . . . Swindler! . . . Villain! . . . Thief! . . . I have not slept for four nights through him. Nathalie is a regular fool; she cannot check the simplest accounts. . . . Why are you standing? Sit down. There is a lot to do. I thought you were going to remain there altogether. I hear you have buried your grandmother. Soon you will be taking me there also. Your Nathalie is quite crazy; she has been crying here without you, she wants to tie you to her skirt. . . . She got a letter from Petersburg saying that you are a sort of irresistible Don Juan."

The old man smiled, and suddenly his wrinkled face with the greyish-yellowish tinge looked brighter, and even attractive.

"If it is necessary I will write to the Governor-General myself and ask for an extension of your leave, and you do me a favour, make a round of the estates and check the accounts in the books of that Jewish scamp Moissei Borisovitch."

At the mention of the steward's name the old man's brows again knit themselves into a frown, and his face regained its spiteful expression. He began pacing up and down the study, nervously drawing around him the folds of his grey

dressing-gown and taking pinches of snuff from the snuff-box given him by the Emperor Nicholas I.

"Get the account-books from that cupboard and sit down here. I shall send for that scamp directly. He has made such a muddle of the accounts of the Saratoff estate that I could not find my way out all the evening yesterday."

Moissei Borisovitch made his appearance an hour later, pale and gloomy. Old Dounaisky glanced at him over his spectacles, opened a thick corded book, and began to show with his finger the figures at the bottom of the pages.

"What have you stuck here? What are these sums? From where have you dug them out?" he asked in a sort of whisper, keeping his rage down.

"I have reported to Your High Excellency that these are the totals, that——"

"Reported! . . . You have reported . . . you scamp . . . swindler! . . . You Christ-betrayer! . . . You have grown rich. . . . You have grown rich, old devil . . ." Dounaisky suddenly stamped his feet and screamed out hoarsely, his voice breaking on the high notes.

Moissei Borisovitch in despair wiped the perspiration from his brow with his pocket-handkerchief. He tried to explain, but Dounaisky would not give him time to do so, and, turning over the pages and passing his finger, quite bent from rheumatism, along the columns of figures, continued to pour forth reproaches and abuse.

"Michail Vladimirovitch, put yourself in my place, for God's sake; explain the accounts. . . ." Moissei Borisovitch turned in his despair to Gourakin.

"He will put himself in your place; wait a bit. . . . He will. . . . To-morrow he will go and make a revision of all the estates. You thought, I am old, and you would have it all your way to fill your pockets. Wait, brother, wait. . . . After the revision I will bring you before the court. . . ."

All day long Dounaisky kept Michail busy over the account-books. Not being in the course of affairs, not understanding the co-ordination of the accounts, Michail felt that towards evening his head began to ache. The old

man did not leave him, and only hindered his work, constantly interrupting him and putting himself into senseless and unrestrained rages against the steward. In the evening Dounaisky let him go, after making him promise that he would obtain an extension of his leave in the morning and immediately start to work on the revision of the estates. Gourakin went upstairs tired out from the work and the fits of rage of the old man.

"Undoubtedly, our General has been too hasty, and is letting his rage get the better of him," said Michail to his wife, sitting down to tea; "but that Moissei Borisovitch is not quite faultless is quite clear to me."

"At any rate, he is not a swindler," remarked Nathalie, "Uncle was the same all his life: one day he trusts a person and another he suspects everyone."

"Perhaps he is not a swindler exactly, but it seems to me that our respected Moissei Borisovitch is rather a bit of a thief. You should see his phiz"—Michail burst into a ringing laugh—"he kept taking off his spectacles, putting them on again, sniffing, shrugging his shoulders, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, and only mumbling: 'Your High Excellency.' . . ."

Michail imitated the steward so well that Nathalie laughed with him.

The next morning, as soon as Gourakin returned from the Governor-General, after having obtained the extension of his leave, a footman ran up to ask him to hasten to descend, as His Excellency was very ill. Michail rushed downstairs, followed by Nathalie. Dounaisky was sitting in his armchair before the writing-table. His head was leaning on one side, the eyes had a glassy stare; one hand was hanging helplessly over the arm of the chair, the other was moving pitifully and convulsively on the table, which was strewn with account-books in great disorder. The old man was removed to his bed. His eyes stared without any meaning; he was unconscious, and only his left hand continued to move unceasingly. A doctor was sent for. Some remedies were applied. Towards evening his eyes were clearer, and he managed to make known his wishes by

choked, half-intelligent sounds. After long and vain efforts on the part of those who were near him, it was understood that he desired that his bed be carried into his study. With muffled steps, talking in whispers, trying not to push against anything, they succeeded in bringing the narrow iron bed, on which lay the body of the small, wizened old man, gazing impassively straight before him, into the great gloomy study, and placing it near the secretaire, where his papers were kept. Towards the night Nathalie had her bed made on the cold leather sofa, but the patient began to mumble restlessly, and the right hand, which was less paralyzed than the left one, moved impatiently and fitfully on the counterpane. Nathalie, desiring to guess the meaning of the indistinct, incoherent sounds, bent down over him. The right eye stared at her angrily, and the cheek worked convulsively under the vain efforts. It took some time to understand that Dounaisky demanded that Michail should remain with him for the night. When the old man saw that Michail came instead of Nathalie, and in his warm dressing-gown took his place in a large leather armchair near his bed, he became calmer and closed his eyes. On the writing-table two candles were burning under a green shade, and the enormous room, with the uncouth, dark, cumbrous furniture, seemed to be enveloped in an ominous semi-obscurity. The camp-bed with the dying old man gave it a still more uncanny aspect. Dounaisky's valet had been ordered to lie down in the next room. Michail, tired out with the cares of the preceding day, leant his head on the high back of the armchair and, stretching out his legs in their soft morocco slippers, shut his eyes and fell into a doze. An immovable and, it seemed, watchful silence reigned in the room. One of the candles began to run. Its flame, springing up and wavering, threw shadows on the ceiling and walls. Gourakin was snoring softly and evenly. The old man opened his eyes and gave a slow look all round the room. Something seemed to quiver on the immovable, ashen-grey face, as if a shade had passed over it. The eyes had a conscious and sorrowful look. They turned slowly towards Gourakin and stopped on his peace-

ful sleeping face. The right hand, lean, dried up and veiny, tugging, trembling, and convulsively clutching at the counterpane, was trying to raise itself and could not. After many and vain efforts it lay quite still. Two large tears flowed slowly, slowly down the old wrinkled cheeks and fell on the pillow. The eyes, with their look of mortal anguish, fastened on Michail's face, woke him. Slowly, struggling with the sleepiness which was overpowering him, he opened his eyes and heard a low moan. He bent down towards the old man and, becoming suddenly wide awake, met the sad look of his eyes.

"Uncle, what is it? Do you want anything?" asked Michail anxiously.

The old man closed his eyes for a second, sighed heavily, and again his anguished look was turned on Gourakin. Michail felt an inexpressible pity for the old man. He took his hand and, holding it between his own, murmured kind and soothing words. By the morning the old man seemed to feel easier. From his long and unintelligible muttering it was understood that he wanted to see the steward. Moissei Borisovitch came up to him, and suddenly his eyes filled with tears. The old man looked at him and moved his hand. Moissei Borisovitch bent down and kissed the feeble helpless hand that but so lately pointed to the totals in the account-books trembling with anger. The patient, after his peace with Moissei Borisovitch, became much calmer. In the evening he felt worse again. He became unconscious. The doctor came, but the old man's state was hopeless. Without regaining consciousness he died in the night.

He had no other relations besides Nathalie, and there was no one to weep over his coffin. The funeral was very pompous. A great number of people, especially officers, followed the body to the grave; a whole array of clergy in their rich robes followed the coffin of the well-known General, and the sounds of the funeral march rose in solemn and grave strains towards the heavens.

XII

DOUNAISKY had left all his fortune of several millions to Nathalie, under the condition that her husband should manage the property. Although he was very old, it was only during the last summer that he had not made the tour of his estates, but had remained throughout that season in his largest estate of Saratoff, which was his favourite one; but he had seen to all the accounts, and Moissei Borisovitch was frequently obliged to pass through stormy scenes and to listen to abuse, reproaches, and accusations of theft. Dounaisky's affairs were in order and the estates more or less under control.

Gourakin made the tour of all the estates, examined all the accounts, and checked the books, and came to the conclusion that Moissei Borisovitch was not quite without guile. His first impulse was to dismiss the steward, but Nathalie took his part warmly, and persuaded her husband to leave him.

"Whatever we do, we cannot be without Moissei Borisovitch at present," said Nathalie to her husband. "He has been managing the affairs so many years, and he knows them all, whereas you, as a newcomer, may not master them all at once. Besides, we must not forget that he has been very useful to us in getting money for us during these years. . . ."

"Don't forget either that the money came out of the pocket of your uncle, as it appears," objected Michail.

"Well, we did not know it. Still, he has often helped us out. Give him to understand that he is to be more careful in future, but please do not dismiss him. You know how miserly and suspicious uncle was, and still he kept him so many years."

Thus it was decided that the steward was to remain for

the time being; Moissei Borisovitch was informed somehow that were it not for Nathalie's intercession he would have lost his place. From that moment he cherished a grudge against Michail, but he hid it deeply in his heart, remaining outwardly the same devoted and faithful servant. At the end of the summer Gourakin removed with his family to the large patrimonial domain of Tashooki, in the government of Saratoff. The six thousand dessiatins of fields and forests seemed to extend without end. Michail went there first, prepared everything for the arrival of his family, and after a few days drove forth at sunrise to meet them at the station. Nathalie, although tired by the journey, seemed fresh and gay, and nestled fondly in her husband's arms. The sun was gilding with his slanting rays the fields and trunks of the pines in the woods. The open carriage with the four horses abreast flew along the well-kept road, the brougham with the children and their governess and nurse following behind.

Nathalie felt very happy; it was decided to spend the autumn in the country, and Nathalie yearned to be in the old house of her family, which, if but for a short time, would enable her to have Michail to herself alone. No evening parties, balls, or theatres would take him from her and bring anxiety and cares to her jealous heart.

Marie was to come from Petersburg soon, but her presence would not be an impediment to their happiness. Nathalie foresaw that Marie would occupy herself with the children, of whom she spoke with such tenderness in her letters. On entering the house and looking it all over, Nathalie embraced her husband and laid her head on his shoulder.

"I feel that we will be happy here," whispered she.

All the servants heartily welcomed their new mistress with bread and salt, and they were very pleased with the beautiful lady, so gay and generous.

A week later Gourakin went to meet his Aunt Marie at the same small railway station. She came out of the train in deep mourning, with a long crape veil, looking much older, her face thinner and very sad. On seeing Michail, she

cried. She remembered their last evening near the bed of her dying mother. Michail kissed her with a brother's tenderness. He was happy that she had consented to come and live with them, that her heart was open for love to his children, and even to his wife. He knew that she had long ago made her peace with Nathalie, and was ready to love her. While they were driving in the carriage Michail told her of his new work, and Marie saw that he was interested in the management of the property and that he did not feel dull in the country.

"There is so much to do here, Aunt Marie, one may do so much good, that I assure you one cannot be dull. I am busy from morning till night. Nathalie is also very much interested in all the property; she is arranging the house to her taste, and we do not remark how the time flies. Next year we will call on our neighbours; there are many here, and, they say, some are very nice."

Meanwhile the carriage had approached the park. Through a long avenue of pines they skirted a large pond with sloping banks, covered with greensward, and with a picturesque summer-house set on a small island. Farther on the carriage passed a white marble obelisk in the middle of a green lawn, which was lit up by the morning sun. In the distance a little white house with a Grecian portico peeped through the trees. Small lawns with groups of birches, ashes, and pines were well kept. The carriage rolled up to a long, two-storied house built in the style of the Alexander the First epoch. All the house was still asleep, only the servant who was waiting for them came out and carried in the hand luggage. Stepping softly and talking in whispers, Michail conducted Marie to the room which was to be hers, looked around to see that all was ready for her, kissed her once more, and left her, closing the door behind him. Marie sank down wearily in her hat and travelling cloak into an armchair and looked around. Near the chair, on a small table, stood a large nosegay of freshly cut roses; on a piece of paper laid in the nosegay there was written, "*Soyez la bienvenue, chère Marie.*"

Marie smiled and, bending her face towards the roses,

inhaled their tender perfume. She was pleased with this attention on Nathalie's part. Her room looked out towards the flower-garden. Large flower-beds, steps leading from the terrace towards the ponds, and bright, yellow-sanded paths. Marie closed the windows and began to undress. The room with its ancient furniture had a look of comfort. A large mahogany toilet-table carved by hand, a washstand with its silver basin and ewer ornamented with chased silver; a few costly old prints, a work-table of the time of Catherine the Great, the low ceilings, oaken doors, and shutters on the windows—all seemed to tell of the former owners of this old patriarchal estate. Marie remembered the country house where her childhood had been passed and where her brother, Michail's father, was now living alone; she remembered also her stately and outwardly proud mother, with whom all her past life from day to day was joined, the life that had passed so quickly, so strangely quickly, that it all seemed a dream now. . . . Marie sat down on her bed and, running her fingers through the ends of her long thick hair, fell into a deep reverie. She was alone now; after burying her mother, under whose wing she had lived from her earliest childhood without noticing how the years went by and how day by day her youth was fading, Marie suddenly awoke to the fact that her life was over without having brought her a single hour of personal happiness, that in the past she had no memories and could have no hopes for the future. Some more colourless years would go by, and she would become quite old, in her rôle of beloved aunt, all her interests and her love given to another's children. It seemed to her that there was something pitiful and humiliating in her fate. . . . One after another the tears rolled slowly down her cheeks and fell into her lap. A door creaked, and someone stepping softly in the corridor outside passed her room. In the window she saw a gardener sweeping the paths. . . . All this was strange to Marie, all were strangers, the house was a stranger too, the whole life. . . . Stifling a heavy sigh, Marie, following the habit of her childhood, knelt down beside her bed and began to say her prayers. At first she

repeated the words half-heartedly. When she came to the prayer for the repose of her mother's soul, Marie pressed her folded hands under her chin and with strong feeling and faith turned all her heart to God. . . . "You, darling, be a comfort to him . . ." the last words of her dying mother passed through her mind, and brought a ray of light to her sorrowing soul.

"My destination, my fate, is to be with Misha. Before her death mamma gave me an object in life; that means it must be so . . ." said Marie with a sigh of submission, lying down between the cool linen sheets. Tired out with her journey, she was soon fast asleep and woke up and left her room when all the rest had breakfasted long ago. On the threshold of the terrace Nathalie came forward to meet her. In her light muslin dress with a deep red rose in her wavy hair near her ear, with a bright colour on her cheeks and a glad smile of welcome on her lips, she seemed to Marie handsomer than she had been three years ago. Nathalie extended both her hands and, seeing the kindly look in Marie's face, put her arms round her and kissed her.

"At last we meet. I am very, very glad, dear Marie, that you have decided to make us happy and to come to us. Let us be good friends; I do so want it. . . . I remember your kind heart."

Nathalie's words sounded sincere, and Marie felt a sympathy towards her which she never felt before, when she used to meet her in society as the wife of Volynsky.

"Your tea will be served here, dear Marie; sit down. Misha is in his study, and the children will be brought here directly."

The view from the vine-covered terrace was splendid. The day was warm, the sky blue, and the sun brightly shining. In the distance the two children appeared with their nurse. Marie went forward to meet them. The boy, a little fellow of twelve months with fat sturdy legs, plump and red-cheeked, strongly resembled his father. He extended his little hand and drew it away again distrustfully. Three-year-old Mimi, in a white piqué dress, with a small red pail in her hand, was standing a little apart and smiling prettily,

her blue eyes looking up from under her eyebrows. She put out her little hand confidently towards Marie, lowered her eyes, allowed herself to be kissed, and then, suddenly taking Marie by the hand, began to talk very fast.

"Small, small . . . so small . . ." she said, holding up two little fingers right before her nose.

"Who is so small, my little one?" asked Marie, admiring the pretty gestures and the childish prattle.

"Little birdie . . . so small. . . ."

The little one took Marie farther into the garden to show her the birdie. From that moment a friendship sprang up between the two, and Marie, fascinated by the child, felt for the first time since her mother's death that the sun was shining kindly, that the flowers smelt sweetly, and her own soul seemed to feel something tender and comforting.

"Well, how did you like my chicks, auntie?" asked Michail at lunch. "How did you find my spoilt darling Mimi?"

"A charming child! She is adorable. There is something so taking about her," answered Marie with feeling.

"Is she like me?"

"Very much like you," answered Marie unhesitatingly, feeling that she would give a great pleasure to her nephew by an affirmative answer, although she did not find the least resemblance between father and daughter.

Nathalie, taking Marie's arm, conducted her all over the large house. Their rooms were on the ground floor, the reception-rooms were on the second story. A broad oaken staircase, covered with a red carpet, led from the hall upwards, dividing into two turnings.

On the walls were large stuccoed arms and crests of the Dounaisky race. On the second turning there was gilded brass worked into the banisters. In the large white ball-room the windows looked out on the pond and the best part of the garden. Here in olden times Dounaisky used to give balls and dinners; farther along there was a room where the pictures of celebrated artists were collected. Then a library and study, a corner drawing-room, and beyond it a beautiful state bedroom all in rose-colour, with looking-glass doors and a broad bed under a stately canopy.

"I used to be here when I was a girl and uncle gave his balls," said Nathalie. "When he was young he used not to be so stingy, and he was known for his capacity of arranging balls and parties. Look, Marie, at this portrait; is she not a beauty? This was uncle's wife, who died young. After her death he left off giving balls and dinners, and the whole house seemed dead. Misha wants to pay some calls next spring and revive the house with a big ball. You know Misha; I can imagine what it will be! He will astonish the whole district. . . . He is so interested in all that concerns the country that I think he ought to retire from military service and serve here in the county by-election. We have such a fortune now that he can create an excellent position for himself wherever he likes."

"Do not you think, Nathalie, that Misha is too young to bury himself in the country?" asked Marie hesitatingly.

"Why should he bury himself? We can pass the winter in Moscow. My uncle has left us a house there as well. You will not believe how much good country life has done Misha! He has become quite another man since he has grown acquainted with its interest. Personally I do not care where we live if only I am with him."

Marie understood that country life pleased Nathalie because her husband was nearer to her and there were no grounds for jealousy.

The Gourakins passed the time in the country peacefully and quietly until October, and came back to Moscow, where they had renovated and refurnished Dounaisky's house, which was now quite changed from the gloomy old mansion with the cumbrous, uncouth furniture. Now all was bright and new, large mirrors reflected light and elegant furniture, beautifully stuccoed ceilings, statues, paintings, and all kinds of modern innovations and luxuries. Marie consented to comply with the prayers of her nephew and his wife and to live with them. She had her own apartments, consisting of five rooms, of which one was occupied by Miss Jones. The latter was still busy with her yellow and green scarves for the poor, who had passed under the care and solicitude of Marie.

XIII

THE life in Moscow began to acquire a new character little by little. Dinner and evening parties were given. The circle of acquaintances increased rapidly, and soon all Moscow spoke of the brilliant receptions at the Gourakins'. Handsome Gourakin was a most cheery host and a desirable cavalier in all the drawing-rooms. Without him no private theatricals or charitable bazaar could be complete. He not only gave generously, but he was at the same time the organizer and performer at such affairs. No social picnic or troika-party was complete without him. Nathalie, with her lovely dresses and singular beauty, was always surrounded by a crowd of admirers and followers, which were necessary to her as a balance to her husband's conquests. In society she was a coquettish, gay woman, and in her heart a woman loving her husband with an illimitable love and submitting to all his wishes rather than leave him alone amid the temptations of a worldly life.

Marie's apartments, with their regular and austere order of living, seemed like a separate world in the noisy gay house always filled with visitors. Little by little the children's world joined Aunt Marie's, and while in the sumptuous apartments people were dancing, singing, arranging private theatricals and *tableaux vivants*, and turning night into day, in the five rooms furnished cosily with old-fashioned furniture, life went on regularly, simply, and wholesomely. The children and Marie rose and went to bed early, took walks together, lunched and dined at regular hours. The little ones with their governess were always there, as Nathalie, after her late hours, could never be up in time to breakfast with her children. She was not jealous of Marie's love and care for the little ones, her heart

being chiefly taken up with her husband. As Marie had taken upon herself to teach Michail in his childhood his first prayers and the letters of the alphabet, so now with the same loving care she undertook this task with his children. Sitting beside her aunt on a high chair, little Mimi learned to spell words in cubes with letters on them, or, awkwardly turning the crochet-hook in her tiny hands, tried to acquire the science of crochet, tangling the wool and enjoying the bright colours. In the summer the family went off to Tashooki and stayed there until October, returning to Moscow for the winter. Michail left the military service and busied himself with the estates. Very soon, entering into all the details himself, he learnt how to manage the property, and did so not worse than Moissei Borisovitch himself, who was still occupying his post, at the desire of Nathalie. Michail became more and more convinced that Moissei Borisovitch needed a strict control, and that it would be dangerous to trust him implicitly; but Nathalie always stood up for him and assured her husband that he was exaggerating, and that she was so used to the services of the steward she could not think of anyone else in his place. There were occasions when Moissei Borisovitch, desiring to obtain Michail's consent to some transactions the advantages of which only he alone could see, addressed himself preliminarily to Nathalie. He always did this very skilfully and prudently. It always seemed as if Nathalie, understanding at once the indisputable advantage of a transaction, agreed with the opinion of the steward, whereas Michail protested and would not agree. Moissei Borisovitch would humbly shrug his shoulders and say in an indifferent voice: "As you like, Michail Vladimirovitch . . . I do not dare to insist. . . ." Then Nathalie would begin to dispute with her husband, and Moissei Borisovitch's plan would succeed. With every year Gourakin became more and more attached to Tashooki, and gave much time and trouble to the affairs of the estate. He loved forests, planted immense tracts of land with trees, and watched with loving care how every new spring the graceful rows of green young saplings grew higher and higher.

He cared for the well-being of the peasants, and they loved and trusted him. An assistant surgeon was engaged for them, a school was being built.

"Michail Vladimirovitch is very broad in his swing," Moissei Borisovitch would say with a condescending smile and shaking his head, to Nathalie. "Now he is wanting to buy new machines and to give the old ones to the peasants. Superfluous charity! And when I wanted to sell a piece of land that we do not want for a profitable price to the peasants, he was obstinate."

The piece of land of which the steward spoke was half covered by a swamp, and Gourakin had forbidden him to sell it, not wishing to profit by the peasants' ignorance. Moissei Borisovitch in his conversations with Nathalie always criticized Michail's orders, and although the revenues did not decrease, but rather increased, Nathalie, without remarking it herself, trusted more to the reasonings of the steward than to facts themselves.

"Michail Vladimirovitch has also projected to build the school unnecessarily," the steward said with regret in his voice. "What do we want with a school? The peasants live like pigs. Let them first be cleaner, let them put their huts in order, become less brutal, and then they may begin to think of learning their letters. We shall spend a lot of money on this school, and there will be no sense, no use for it, my word of honour."

Listening to the arguments of Moissei Borisovitch, who skilfully put forward the heavy figures showing the cost of construction of the school, Nathalie used to come to the conclusion that he was right, that her husband was too generous with the money, and that the good to be done to the peasants was rather doubtful.

"Please, Nathalie, do not irritate me with arguments which have not a grain of common sense," Michail would say with some warmth, when Nathalie used to reproach him for not being practical enough, and bring forward arguments which she had heard from the steward. "To make the peasant less of a brute you must give him a bit of learning. We have made him a free man, we have

accomplished this godly work, now we must end it quickly, and not stop in the middle."

It happened frequently that Michail used to go to his aunt and complain of his wife. Then Marie would lead Nathalie to talk on the subject, and word by word would succeed in making her see that her nephew was right in his cares for the welfare of the peasants. But in town it was otherwise. In the winter Nathalie used to run in to Marie in her quiet rooms on the ground floor and in great agitation pour out her heart to her: Michail was passing too many nights in restaurants, was paying court to this lady or to that one; Michail came home not sober in the small hours of the morning; Michail was hiding letters, naturally of a romantic character; Michail, instead of returning with his wife from some ball, had accompanied Madame Z., and so on; the complaints, and with them the tears, flowed on without ceasing.

"Do not cry, Nathalie, I will speak to Michail." Marie tried to comfort her. "This may be only accidental. Misha has such a good heart, and if one speaks kindly to him he admits his fault and always repents of it. You, Nathalie, are too hasty sometimes, and do not always understand him. Certainly he is wrong, I do not defend him, but, *chère* Nathalie, you must remember he is very young."

"Anyhow, he is twenty-eight now; it is time for him to be steadier," Nathalie would remark irritably.

"And you are very much over thirty," Marie thought, and, although sympathizing with Nathalie's griefs, pitying her nephew at the same time. On the very first opportunity she would call him to her rooms and mildly rebuke him for his careless behaviour in regard to his wife. Michail would justify himself as best he could, then he would confess his sins to his aunt and relate his adventures, which turned out to be much more serious than Marie expected.

"Ah, Misha, Misha; how can you! How can you have at the same time a kind heart, and brains, and love for God, and so much deceit in you?"

"But what am I to do otherwise, aunt?"

"Not deceive—it is so simple," Marie would cry, looking at her nephew with reproach.

"Now, auntie, that is impossible. I cannot leave Nathalie, because I have children, and because she will not survive separation from me, and on the other hand I cannot and will not give her all my love and thoughts"

Michail spoke positively, without passion, and Marie felt in his words a serious determination.

"You understand, aunt, that Nathalie as a companion for life is not suited to me. I love life and all that it comprises; Nathalie loves only me, or rather me for herself. If it were not for Mimi I certainly would not have married her. You reproach me for spending much money, but really, auntie, I work so much in the management of her property, I guard her interests and increase her revenues so well, that the extra ten or twenty thousand that I throw away for my own amusements make but a small item in her colossal fortune."

"But how can you speak of your love for other women, my boy, when you have a wife? It is a sin, and dishonourable."

"Ah, auntie, leave aside theology and morality; the latter was made to suit the people and not the people to suit the morality. What do I care about morals when I cannot live without enthusiasms and passions? All my impulses, all my thoughts, my forces, all my energies centre in love for woman. Like a heathen I erect an altar not to one, but to many gods. On my knees I burn incense and adore every woman who awakes in me the happiness of love, everyone who creates in me a storm of passion. If you see in me a world of life and energy it is because I am constantly in an atmosphere of love. Without love there is no real life. If I could love one woman with such passion and for all my life, you would not deem it a sin from your point of view, but not all of us have the same organization of the heart. My heart is made in such a way that I love each new woman deeper and more passionately, as if in gratitude to her for having opened before me a new world of sensations, impressions, and love for life."

"What would mamma say if she heard you?" Marie shook her head sadly.

"She would blame me with her reason, but in her soul I think she would have understood. *Grand'maman* had a great depth of soul, and she understood things that others blamed; but you also, auntie, you understand me. Your soul, I feel, is akin to mine," Michail would say, kissing his aunt's hand.

"I pity you, Misha. I see that you are giving yourself up to your passions without restraint, and not only do not struggle against them, but you rejoice in their power over you. Your family suffers therefrom. Nathalie, always in fear of losing you, gives up to you all her thoughts and forces, and very little is left to the children's share. Mimi never takes her eyes off you; she is a very sensitive child, and, believe me, will soon begin to understand much more than other children understand at her age. You must try to control yourself for the sake of your children."

"No, auntie, please don't begin to frighten me with my children. Do not make scarecrows for me out of their dear little heads. Having such an aunt to bring them up as you are, they will learn to love their father, and not criticize him."

Marie's exhortations generally ended in nothing in this way, and the Gourakins' life, outwardly so brilliant and happy, held hidden sorrows which tortured Nathalie inexpressibly. Michail, fearing to give himself up to sad thoughts, fearing to acknowledge the steadily increasing discord of his family life, and at the same time, alone with himself, suffering from this discord, stifled the voice of his conscience and as in a dream threw himself into the vortex of a life of pleasure.

After the death of his grandmother he saw his father several times. Vladimir Gourakin had forgiven his son, but he never expressed a wish to see his wife. The son was happy that the quarrel was ended, and not wishing to irritate his father, never raised this question. Four years after his mother's death Vladimir Gourakin died at his country seat, leaving his son a large fortune. On receiv-

ing his inheritance Michail felt a great relief, as the large fortune of his wife seemed to make him dependent on her, and this was a heavy yoke for his proud spirit. Now the knowledge of his independence made him much happier and calmer, but at the same time it increased his thirst for the pleasures of life, which had become easier of attainment to him as a very rich man.

If Gourakin joined any feasting company, then all knew that the champagne would flow in streams; the servants in the restaurants received enormous tips, the orchestra and the tsiganes had wines served them; for each song performed at the request of the company they received a hundred roubles. For all that was eaten and drunk and for the broken crockery the fabulous accounts were sent to Michail's home, and there they were paid without complaint. All Moscow loved him and called him a true Russian gentleman.

One day, during the carnival week, coming out of a restaurant with as much wine as he could carry, Gourakin was going down the Tverskaia with a friend. Suddenly they heard screams in the distance. People were running to all sides in fear; the cabmen were beating their horses and making them turn into the side streets. A troika was tearing madly down the Tverskaia, scattering all on its way. The horses with the bits between their teeth, throwing up clouds of snow-dust, were rushing along without a coachman. The lady in the sleigh, half crazy with fear, was holding on to the back of the sleigh and screaming desperately.

In one moment Michail ran out into the middle of the street. The troika was tearing down on him. In the crowd which was running away a cry of horror was heard. In a second the maddened horses had run down Gourakin, trampled him and then risen on their haunches, and stopped still, snorting and rolling the whites of their eyes. Michail, without a hat, with a side of his coat torn off, was hanging on the reins, holding the horses with an iron hand under their bridles. Several men rushed to his assistance. They freed him. His shoulder and his leg were severely knocked

about. In the evening half Moscow knew of his mad courage, and his prestige grew still more.

When he was thirty years of age he had the firmly established reputation of a gay, madcap comrade in revels, a good-natured and careless spendthrift, a conqueror of women's hearts, and a richly endowed, talented lover of arts. Poor artists and musicians without engagements and without money always found a friend in Gourakin. He obtained engagements for them, and helped them with money. Beginners received subsidies from him or he paid for their lessons. Nathalie protested and quarrelled with her husband. Michail used to get vexed and disappear from home for whole evenings and nights, but he continued to do as he liked.

Moissei Borisovitch, making up a total of all the expenses for charitable purposes for a whole year, found occasion to bring it to the knowledge of Nathalie.

"With every year Michail Vladimirovitch becomes more generous," he began, with a good-humoured smile. "Without speaking of the peasants and all kinds of beggars, what sums we have spent on artists I dare not even state!" he continued, his good-humoured tone of voice changing to a pitying one. "I would advise you, Nathalie Georgievna, to teach these artists and singers not to reckon so much on our bank account; otherwise, if we continue at such a pace, it will not be difficult to be ruined."

"What are you saying, Moissei Borisovitch! With our fortune are these expenses so very great then?" objected Nathalie half doubtfully, half anxiously.

"But, Nathalie Georgievna, even millions can be exhausted. Look into the books some day. . . . The expenses are unheard of this year. What the balls and restaurants alone have cost! During the three weeks that Michail Vladimirovitch spent abroad he deigned to expend over five thousand roubles. . . . And now he has ordered me to send every month two hundred roubles to Milan for the lessons of a young singer, who sang several times at your evening parties. I tried to protest against this, but

he shouted at me. 'You do not understand anything,' he said; 'such a voice, it is a sin not to support him.' . . . But there are many artists and voices. We do not keep a conservatoire for them."

"Most certainly," said Nathalie. "I will speak to my husband without fail. . . ."

"Only please leave me out of the question, Nathalie Georgievna, or else there will be unpleasantness again. He will say that I am poking my nose there where I am not asked."

"You may be assured, Moissei Borisovitch, I will not betray you; I will say that I took the books to check up a lost bill and saw this unexpectedly. And you, please, send up the book from the business room."

"It is madness, it is folly, to spend money in such a way," Nathalie was saying to her husband a few days afterwards. "It will end in your getting all our affairs out of order. . . . We must not forget that we have children. . . . Look, please; restaurant bill, 800 roubles; restaurant bill, 630 roubles; restaurant bill, 540 roubles; restaurant bill, 680 roubles. It is incredible, Michail! What will it be farther?"

"Spare me, spare me all these preachings, my dear, and do not spoil my good humour."

"But you always seem to be in a good humour," Nathalie objected irritably.

"Learn how to prize it, then. When you find that your revenues are decreasing, then begin to preach, but so long as I keep all in order, please exempt me from all control, or perhaps you had better transfer it to your Jew, Moissei Borisovitch, who nearly sold a troika of the stud horses. Now he is trying to exculpate himself, but it is not so easy to deceive me."

It was quite clear to Nathalie that a secret enmity was growing between her husband and the steward. Nathalie's confidence in the steward who had managed the affairs of her old uncle was not shaken after Michail's words; she did not doubt that he was irritated against Moissei Borisovitch

because the latter did not approve of his extravagance, and was utterly devoted to her personal interests. She called him oftener to talk on business, and she prized the crafty Jew more and more. Michail used to tease his wife, but continued to look after all the affairs himself, control the steward in everything, and enjoy life with inexhaustible energy.

XIV.

At a distance of two versts from Moscow is a religious house called the Voskresensky Convent. All white, with its gilded cupolas, it can be seen from afar. Near the big entrance gates with iron railings a nun usually sits on a low footstool knitting stockings. The spring sun was now warming her, and putting aside her work, she gazed often for a long time into the far distance beyond the road where the fields were beginning to turn green. Shading her eyes with her hand, she looked attentively down the road which wound its way near the woods of the convent. At last behind a cloud of dust she recognized the well-known carriage drawn by a pair of handsome white horses. Not a week passed but this carriage used to stop at the doors of the convent on feast-days. The nun looked on with a glad smile of greeting and followed with her eyes the cloud of dust moving along with the carriage and dispersing afterwards, driven away by the wind. The fleet horses stopped at the doors, and Marie came out of the carriage, followed by a pretty little fair-haired girl all in white.

"Good-morning, Your Excellency," the nun greeted the newcomers with a low bow. "I have been waiting for you; I was thinking, 'Why are they not coming?' . . . The bells have long ago stopped ringing."

"Marfinka darling," said the little girl, embracing the nun, "after the service come to fetch me to walk in the garden."

"If the Princess will allow it, sweet little soul, I would be glad to come for you," answered the nun, fondling the child.

"I have brought you some apple tarties, so good!" the little girl whispered into Marfinka's ear.

"Thank you, little one, that you remembered me. Go on, go on now; your aunt is waiting for you."

Mimi caught her aunt up and, walking along the broad path which encircled the clean paved courtyard, they reached the convent church. From the choir came the sounds of the nuns' melodious singing. In passing their rows Marie and Mimi answered their greetings, and having reached their places they both knelt down. Father Fedor came out of the chancel with the censer in his hand. The blue smoke of the incense rose upwards in light transparent waves and melted in the rays of the sun, which poured in a sheaf of gold through the side window of the cupola. In front, on a crimson carpet to the right of the choir, in a hood and black mantle reaching to the ground, leaning on a stout black staff, stood the fat, middle-aged Mother-Superior, Princess Anna Valerianovna—Mother Alexandra now, since she had taken the *schema.** Her flabby yellow face looked very austere. The thin compressed lips and the fold between the eyebrows denoted, as formerly, her firmness of will and love of power. Behind her stood a young lay-sister, and each time that she knelt down or rose from her knees the sister helped her carefully and respectfully by supporting her elbow. The Princess, who had been suffering from pains in her legs, had become quite cured since she had taken the *schema.* She had long ago left Petersburg and lost all connection with it. At rare intervals she used to go there to visit the school, which was now wholly under the management of Olga Onisimovna. Otherwise she led quite a hermit's life, and only saw those who came to see her at the convent. When the service was over, Marie went up to her with the child, and after a few words of greeting they passed out together through the side doors of the church into a long light gallery with high arches and round windows placed very high up in the wall. The gallery led to the chief wing, where the Princess's apartments were situated, and those of the sisters who managed the economical part of the convent. Father Fedor's apartments were in a separate wing, adjoining the chief one.

* Vows of the severest order.—Translator.

Slowly bending her head in answer to the deep bows of the sisters whom they met on their way, stepping heavily in her soft shoes, and leaning on her staff, the Princess passed with her guests into her own apartments, which consisted of three low, modest little rooms. The first was a study and reception-room, the second a dining-room, and the third a small bedroom with a large case for the ikons, in which were many rich old ikons brought over from the private chapel in Petersburg. They went to the dining-room, where a lunch was served: a pasty, fish cutlets, and tea, with honey and jam. Eight-year-old Mimi, seating herself demurely at the table, looked at everything in great enjoyment. All that was served at the table of the severe-looking Princess-nun seemed to Mimi to be particularly good and quite extraordinary. Everything pleased her in the peaceful cloister: the beautiful church with the melodious singing of the nuns, their black garments, their cells, the merry young lay-sister Sophia, and the good-natured door-keeper Marfinka, and the garden with the apples and cherries, and the bee-hives, and the river in the garden, where she could catch fish with a home-made hook—in a word, the whole convent seemed to Mimi to be a magic world in which special joys were hidden. At lunch the conversation was general. The Princess told Marie of the patients who had left the convent hospital, of those who had entered it, asked her advice regarding an orphan from the convent school, who was imploring them to take her in as a lay-sister to serve her term before taking the vows, against the wishes of her relations, and complained of asthma and palpitations of the heart.

"*Ma tante*, may I go into the garden with Marfinka?" asked Mimi as soon as the lunch was over.

When Mimi was gone the Princess passed with Marie into the study, where she sank down into a low soft arm-chair, stretched out her feet and took up her beads.

"So you say, Marie, that they are starting to-morrow," continued the Princess, taking up the last subject of their conversation—"and how about the country?"

"They will go on to Tashooki from Paris. And I, with

the children and Miss Jones, am going there directly after Easter."

"What would they do without you, my dear, or rather, what would the poor children do without you!"

"But now I love them so, Princess, that I cannot think of what my life would be without the little dear children. If you could know what a good heart this little girl has, how tender she is, *quelle délicatesse d'âme*. . . . Her adoration of her father is beyond all limits, and notwithstanding that Misha spoils her dreadfully, the child is not spoilt at all. There are moments when I feel a great admiration for the child, she is so meek and intelligent."

"And is she as loving towards her mother?"

"Naturally she loves her, but you cannot imagine, Princess, with what strange eyes she looks at her mother when Nathalie is irritable and unkind to Misha before the children. One must be very careful with her. I am afraid she will not be happy in future."

"Tell me, please, Marie, and what are the plans for the winter? How about the purchase of the house?"

"Misha has decided to remove to Petersburg by next winter, and the purchase of the house has already taken place. All the furniture is going to be taken there, and Nathalie wants to let or sell the house in Moscow."

"If it is not too expensive, I might buy it for the school. Father Fedor has been urging me for a long time to have the school transferred to Moscow, and I agree with him; the journeys to Petersburg are very trying to me, and the school is without supervision there. Tell Nathalie to think about it and to send me Moissei Borisovitch for the negotiations. Naturally, you will also go to Petersburg with them?" continued the Princess after a moment's silence.

"Where they are, there am I," Marie smiled.

"Now tell me, my dear, what is the story with Misha at the ball of the Marshal of the Nobility? Orlovskaia was here the other day; she mentioned something accidentally, but I did not want to ask her. What has he done this time?"

Marie shook her head with compunction.

"Ah, Princess, it is sad to remember even. Misha cares for nothing."

"Do tell me, my dear; you know I won't speak of it."

"But there is no need to hide it; all Moscow knows it."

"The more reason for you to relate it."

The Princess ensconced herself still more comfortably in her armchair, preparing to hear something of interest.

"As usual, Misha was to conduct the dances at the ball at the Marshal's. Instead of going there directly, he first went to a dinner with his comrades somewhere. I know that there was a large company, and that some of them had to be at the ball also. Naturally Misha drank more than was good for him, because, when leaving for the ball, he laid a scandalous wager with the nephew of the Governor-General."

Marie faltered a moment.

"What wager? I can fancy!" The Princess smiled slightly.

"Misha had taken an article of toilet from one of the ladies who were with them, trimmed with ribbons and laces. . . . You know what I mean. . . . He laid a wager that at supper he would use it instead of a table-napkin and during the cotillon he would fan himself with it. Think only, Princess, what a scandalous wager, and where? At such a brilliant ball! All that had been stipulated he did, at the supper-table, and Annette Voljskaia, who sat opposite to Michail, says that she noticed he had something strange in his hands instead of a table-napkin. But you can think what a horrible scandal there was when, during the cotillon, just at the moment when he was fanning his face, someone pushed him, the thing slipped from his hands, and got caught by someone's spur. General consternation and astonishment! Nathalie, when she heard that it was a trick of Michail's, was in despair, and left the ball at once, but he was in raptures that he won the wager, and was not at all disconcerted by the scandal. Afterwards he went to everyone to make his excuses, and of course managed to

arrange matters with his usual good nature and fascination."

"Ah, what a scandal!" The Princess shook her head. "I can imagine how unpleasant this was for Nathalie. He is unmanageable, and really I find that with the years his follies do not leave him, but seem to increase. You ought to restrain him, dear Marie; you always had a good influence over him, he is such friends with you."

"I very often speak to him, Princess. While I am preaching he listens, quite silent, and seems to be even very much ashamed of himself; but as soon as I stop, he is again laughing, and assures me that he feels how devilkins are creeping out of all his pores. Now this trip to Paris! I am begging Nathalie not to go with him, to allow him to be there alone a month or two, let him leave all his devilry there. Well, no, she will insist on having her way; she affirms she will be able to keep him from spending too much money. But I know Misha: if anyone goes against him he will be worse still."

"Yes; that is a great pity," said the Princess with feeling, and sat a moment lost in thought. "Believe me, Marie, you have lost nothing in not being married," she continued after a silence. "The examples are before your eyes. You say yourself that Misha is a good and kind man, but can you call him a good husband, and what has Nathalie gained by throwing over Volynsky? We do not know what will happen next. . . . I do not foresee anything good. And Prince Alexei! . . . What a life has he made for me and for himself! . . ."

At the remembrance of her husband the Princess became agitated. Her beads fell into her lap, her fingers trembled, and a slight convulsion disfigured her mouth.

"All my life I bore patiently many pricks to my self-love, and even insults," continued the Princess, touching the collar of her dress in her customary way when she was agitated. "I thought that when he would be old he would return to his family. . . . I do not murmur against God's will; I have now wholly given myself up to prayer and the affairs of the convent, but I wish no one to end their life

with such bitter memories as I have. And people consider Prince Alexei to be a good, and gentle, and an honourable man. . . . All his virtues have just led to this—he has brought disorder into our affairs, broken up our family life, and brought shame on his name by his liaison with that——" The Princess nearly said a bad word, but she stopped in time, and began rapidly and nervously to pass her beads through her fingers.

Marie was silent. She knew that each time that the Princess remembered her husband she became agitated. Evidently, neither fasting, nor prayers, nor the affairs of the convent could stifle the bitter feeling of injustice in her heart, or perhaps a secret love for her husband.

"I have heard," began the Princess again, "that he goes openly with her abroad and lives there with her. I never had such an honour"—she smiled with disdain—"he even used to joke about it—that I was not wanted there."

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Mimi, and Marie began to make her adieux.

"Then tell Nathalie about the house; perhaps we will agree about the price," the Princess reminded her again.

On returning home Marie passed into her own dining-room, where lunch was served. Miss Jones, Mimi, the little lively Boris and the governess were there also. The children prattled merrily; Miss Jones ate her luncheon conscientiously and assiduously; Marie was very thoughtful. Her lawyer had been to see her the day before on personal business of her own, and he had told her among other things that he had heard that Gourakin's steward was carrying on negotiations respecting the sale of part of the forests of the Riazan estates, and that he thought it was being done without the knowledge of Gourakin. Marie knew that lately there had been occasions when the steward had acted with the knowledge of Nathalie, but that Michail was the last to hear of it. Generally it occurred in such cases when the matter promised a good profit to Moissei Borisovitch and a doubtful one for the Gourakins. In the given case the steward might be acting with the knowledge of Nathalie, and then any intervention on the part of Marie

might only lead to a dispute between the husband and wife. Marie, keeping herself always apart from all business relations of her nephew's, but at the same time an involuntary witness of all that passed, had frequently had occasion to conclude that lately the steward was becoming more and more independent, and not only did not seem to consider Michail's wishes, but managed to act unknown to him, through the intermediary of Nathalie. Marie knew that the peasants did not like him and that the employees, who all loved Michail, disliked the steward and called him a skilful rogue. After long consideration and doubts, Marie decided to keep silence and not to intervene, seeing that if the steward had had the audacity to sell a forest which Michail valued highly and to do so unknown to Nathalie, then, certainly, sooner or later, it would come to their knowledge and would open Nathalie's eyes to his unfaithfulness.

A few days before their departure, in one of the rare evenings when the Gourakins were at home and without any visitors, they came to Marie to drink tea. The conversation touched upon their departure and on the impending packing off of the little ones to the country. Marie carefully led the conversation to the Riazan estate, which she had heard praised for its beauty.

"Why should you not sell it, Nathalie?" she asked intentionally.

"Why should I, Marie? Such a splendid estate!"

"But you never go there; why do you want it?"

"But Tashooki and the Riazan property are the best estates. No, I will not sell it for anything. I will give Tashooki to Boris after my death, and the Riazan estate will go to Mimi."

"I have heard that you have beautiful forests there and many of them."

"Splendid forests. But on the whole the Riazan estate is smaller than the Saratoff one by fifteen hundred dessiatins, and with time I have in view to purchase some more land or forests."

Now Marie was quite convinced of Moissei Borisovitch's

dishonesty, and decided to keep silence, so as to let the sale take place.

Very soon Michail, very displeased that his wife was going with him, having arranged all his affairs on the property, went off abroad, after a tender farewell to his aunt and children. Nathalie, who was leaving her children for the first time, even cried a little, and repeatedly committed them to Marie's greatest care, although she knew very well that under their aunt's wing they would be much better off than under her own.

XV

THE Gourakins passed through Vienna, Trieste, Venice, and stopped at Milan on the Piazza del Duomo. They were just leaving the hotel for a stroll when in the porch they met Tchagin. Astonishment, glad exclamations, handshakings, embracings and questions: How? When? Where to? and From where?

"This is a surprise!" Tchagin kept saying with a smile and at the same time peering at the passers-by, who were examining with curiosity the tall, unnaturally thin foreigner.

"Where are you going, Sasha?" asked Nathalie, very pleased to meet him, as she felt that Michail was feeling dull in her society.

"Come, join us, dear friend," interrupted Michail, also very pleased with the encounter.

A happy idea had been born in his mind—to carry Tchagin away with them so as to obtain a little liberty for himself by leaving his wife with his friend, or else to get some amusement for himself in the company of the latter.

"If you are going southwards, I will join you with pleasure," answered Tchagin, to the great joy of Gourakin.

After resting a few days in Milan—the only town in Italy that Tchagin did not love because of its mercenariness in making a trade of art—they proceeded southwards without any system or established plan, first passing by all the lakes. For Michail, who adored nature and the arts, the meeting with Tchagin was a very happy occurrence. Tchagin never let a year pass without visiting Italy, and therefore he knew her right through. He loved this country of sun and beauty with a touching and pious love.

"My spirit always lived in this country. In Russia it

was only incarnated for the first time," Tchagin used to say often. "Therefore the nature of that country is always strange and dull to me; it does not appeal to my soul. Russian by birth, I love our nation, our beautiful Slavonic nature, noble, generous, indolent, and without a care, but Russia as a country I do not like, and I even feel oppressed by it. I have left my estates because I was oppressed by the neighbourhood of the villages, with their dismal grey *isbas* (little houses), as grey and colourless as their owners, the peasants. . . . I was stifled by those muddy roads, along which I passed as a master, those never-drying ditches, tattered children with their inflated stomachs, sickly and ugly, lying about in the dirt under the foul and crooked enclosures. As much as I was able to I tried to introduce the feeblest signs of culture, but I was powerless to vanquish their apathy in regard to their brutish condition. I left my estates not to torture myself purposely. I envy your husband," Tchagin said to Nathalie; "his eyes glisten when he begins to tell me of his improvements in the country. One feels his love of the earth, whereas I flee it, and only feel happy here under these hot rays, on these shores of the Italian seas, with the eternally blue and warm waves."

When they stopped in the small sea-towns Tchagin used to go away alone, sit down on the shore, and, taking his hat off, let the sun's burning rays rest on his small head, remaining so without movement, watching the far distance and the warm gentle waves coming in. He listened to their murmur, to their splashes at the foot of the grey rocks, their gurgling between the crevices covered with green moss, and they spoke to him of deep, touching and beautiful things which Nathalie could not understand at all. When they roamed through the narrow streets, like small galleries, of some little town, Tchagin was always deeply affected, and his soul, with its keen love of beauty, used to seek for words to express his feelings.

"You just look," he would say in a low impressed voice, taking Michail's arm; "become penetrated with this language of colours and shades! See those many-

coloured, sun-burnt clothes hung up by a careless hand . . . those toy-houses with the small wooden balconies, with the walls from which the plaster has come off, and covered with roses and awnings of lilac glycineas. . . . Or that tiny piazetta with the portico; the shops, shaded from the heat with yellow striped tissues; that low column with the jets of water falling into the marble basin; the Santa Madonna in her little painted niche, and near by the marvellous ancient cathedral with the marble columns, the delicate carving on the pilasters, the frescoes on the walls, the incomparable mosaic work. And all this is flooded with the blessed rays of the bright and burning sun! . . . The whole scene overwhelms one with the beauty of the lines and colours, grouping themselves so naturally, forming themselves into an unimaginable gamut of blendings. Here reigned the gods of Olympus, here was born the imperishable idea of beauty. . . . Nathalie, look around you, and say if you do not feel a desire to fold your hands piously as for prayer and to bend your knees before something, before someone? . . . 'Oh, Italia! Thou who hast the fatal gift of beauty,' as Byron said, and as I always repeat."

"Certainly, Sasha, all this is very beautiful, but . . ."

"But your soul is dumb," concluded Tchagin. "These low porticoes, this rustling little fountain, these sun-burnt, half-naked little children, so handsome and strong, burnt by the sun and washed by the salt sea. . . . And this smell of the sea, the smell of oysters! . . . How many times in ball-rooms I shut my eyes and feel myself borne away here, and, inhaling the air, I drink in the intoxicating breath of the sea and watch the dazzling little streets full of sunlight, the tiny columns, the tables near the little cafés with the lazy Italians drowsy from the heat. How I love all this, how near and dear it all is to me! . ."

Michail shared the raptures of his friend, but he was far from understanding the refined enjoyment which Tchagin experienced each time that his foot touched the soil of Italy, so kindred to his spirit. He gave a handsome tip to the wandering Italian with a large organ drawn by a patient grey donkey, stopping before each café, before each open

window. "*La mare rida . . . l'aria serena . . . Santa Lucià . . . Santa Lucia,*" sang the Italian, throwing into the warm fragrant air the melodious and mellow notes of the Neapolitan song.

"*Ecco il gran' signor!*" said he, smiling and showing his glistening teeth and shining black eyes, on receiving the generous gift from Gourakin.

Nathalie soon tired of running from piazettas to cathedrals and being burnt by the sun, and she consented to rest a week in Bologna, while Michail with Tchagin went down to the Adriatic. Tchagin took Gourakin to Ravenna to see Dante's tomb. In this little town, which seemed as if it had slept for a hundred years, Michail experienced something akin to what his friend was feeling. The monuments of olden ages untouched by time spoke eloquently to the wondering wayfarer of the power of beauty, inborn in the people from its earliest infancy. The cathedral of St. Apollinarius, a purest basilic, with white marble columns of incomparable beauty and lightness and the richest mosaic on the walls; the cathedral of St. Vitellius in the form of a rotunda, covered with coloured mosaics on a golden mosaic ground, are both beautiful, but the mausoleum of the ancient Queen of Gallia, Placida, is the height of art. It is built of yellow marble, and has no openings for windows. Instead of five windows the marble in these parts is hollowed to a depth of two or three fingers; when the doors are shut the light inside the mausoleum is of a rosy opaline colour. Three marble sarcophagi, beautifully carved, contain the bodies of the Queen and her two husbands. Beginning from half-way up the wall, all the upper part is covered with the finest mosaic work, which by its bright colours and delicate execution can well compete with paintings.

"This is what this people created as far back as the fourth and fifth centuries! What a delicacy of artistic taste, what technical qualities!" Tchagin said with pride, seemingly persuaded that those grand old Italian masters reposing in their century-old graves were related to him in spirit.

Before the mausoleum of Theodoric the Great, entwined

with rose creepers, Michail stood still, struck by its singular beauty and grandeur.

"Notice that the upper part is one whole piece of stone, with a diameter of eighteen metres," said Tchagin.

"Wonderful!"

"Yes; in the second century the builders were Titans, not men."

On the steps of Dante's mausoleum Tchagin bent his head in deep thought. In the hanging carved lamp, the gift of Florence, a light was burning.

"I have come to the conclusion that Dante possessed mediumistic propensities, and he was given to see what we, simple mortals, cannot see. The flight of creative fantasy alone cannot be responsible for such images. . . . Great Dante of great Italy! . . ." whispered Tchagin slowly.

"Really, Sasha, you seem to be a man torn out of old past centuries," Gourakin said to Tchagin when they were returning after a week's wandering. "Your soul is akin to ours—a Slavonic soul; but your spirit—you are right—has come to you from here. Thanks to you, I have learnt to know many things better, to understand them more fully; but for my own part, our Vassily Blajenny, the Uspensky Cathedral, our forests, steppes, our mother Volga, our shady garden with the lake, our ancient house in Tashooki, are indisputably nearer to the heart and dearer and more sweet than Dante's mausoleum and the lazy prattle of a fountain on a dreamy, sun-flooded piazetta."

"Yes, yes, you are certainly right," answered Tchagin, "because all this is foreign to you, and for me it is home. I was sixteen years old when I first saw Italy. I do not know why, but from my earliest childhood I always dreamed of this country, to which I was irresistibly attracted."

The Gourakins and Tchagin went on to Rome, Naples and Florence, stopping at the best hotels and living in such grand train that the hotel-keepers saw them off with flowers and low bows. In Viareggia they separated. Tchagin remained on the Mediterranean shores, and the Gourakins went on farther.

XVI

Two weeks passed by for Michail like a dream. In Paris his energy seemed to have increased tenfold. Whole days he went about the boulevards and museums without a rest; he rode in the Bois de Boulogne and made merry and revelled on the Montmartre until the morning. Nathalie began to feel the absence of her children and to wish to exchange the bustle and brilliancy of Paris for the peaceful, quiet country life. In Paris she could not always follow Michail as she had done in Italy; here, when they met any one of their Petersburg friends, they had frequently to go out separately. These last days Michail never managed to be at the appointed rendezvous, owing to unforeseen circumstances, and at the time when Nathalie and their mutual friends would be waiting for him at some theatre, he would appear to be in some other place, and come back to the hotel so late that Nathalie, unable to keep awake to scold him well, had fallen asleep. On the next morning, as soon as she opened her mouth to express her displeasure, Michail used to interrupt her and with an inexhaustible fund of gaiety relate to her the events of the preceding night.

"Fancy, Nathalie, whom I met!" said he one morning, trying to prevent the scene inevitable after his disappearance from morning till morning. "Guess whom I met yesterday on the Boulevard des Italiens. . . . Aline! Not changed at all—*d'un chic parisien*, gay, happy. . . . She is expecting you to-day at four o'clock. As soon as she saw me she made me come to her home. She has a splendid apartment near the Champs Elysées. She lives in Paris always, continues to adore Prince Bibiche, and assured me that she feels herself to be the happiest woman in the world."

"Is he here?" asked Nathalie.

"No, he comes several times during the winter, and in summer they travel. I tell you, the Prince has arranged his life excellently," Gourakin laughed.

"It is all very well for him, but I do not envy Aline."

"Well, she told me herself that she is quite happy and that the Prince is becoming more and more attached to her with every year."

"All this is very well, but I do not think it can be pleasant to live in such a doubtful position."

"Why not? In Paris everyone considers her the wife of the Prince, and in Petersburg she has spread the rumour that her aunt died and left her a fortune."

"She may say whatever she likes: no one believes her, and all know very well that she is living at the Prince's expense."

"In the end I agree with your Aline that the chief object in life is to be happy, but whether our happiness pleases or does not please people with whom we have nothing to do is really of no importance. Personally I am very glad for her. Surely her life, with her tastes, was not sweet, and now, not only is she provided for, but she has found happiness in love."

"To listen to you one would think that the best thing is to live without marriage," Nathalie interrupted her husband with irritation.

"It is difficult to judge what is better, what is worse," said Michail thoughtfully. "Let everyone find his happiness wherever he can. . . ."

"I cannot bear those immoral opinions of yours." Nathalie suddenly got excited. "Who knows how each of us would like to arrange his life? But one has to reckon with public opinion and the feeling of duty."

"Spare me, spare me, my dear, from sermons on morality," said Michail, shrugging his shoulders. "Firstly, I am too old for them, and secondly, I am in especially good spirits to-day, and so you must not spoil them."

"You should invent something else than your usual statement that you are in excellent spirits. I think there

are no circumstances which would be capable of taking you out of this chronic state."

"That, my dear, is exclusively the result of my equanimity. I am never angry with anyone. I wish everyone well, I love life, physically I feel very well—that is why I am gay—whereas you are always irritated, and nothing interests you."

"Oh, of course, everyone knows what a hateful character I possess. I have heard it from you hundreds of times. . . ."

Nathalie would have liked to raise a quarrel, to be able to speak out all that had been accumulating during the last days in her heart against her husband, but Michail rose hastily and, keeping back his laughter, in a moment had his coat on and his hat in his hand.

"*Madame, je vous tire ma révérence.*" He bowed with a comic gesture before his wife, like a naughty schoolboy.

"Where are you going? Wait a bit," Nathalie said angrily.

"I must hurry. At three I have a rendezvous with Valouieff at the Café de Paris. You go to Aline; stay to dinner with her, and about ten I shall come up with Valouieff and we shall all go somewhere together."

"Listen, Misha: I must warn you quite seriously that I am terribly tired of this life. It is time for us to return to the country, and besides, we have spent such a mass of money that——"

"Again you have money on your mind! Devil take it! It is there to be spent."

"But not in such quantities as you do."

"Very well. Another time I promise you to listen to the end to your economical lectures, but now I must run. . . ."

"Misha, I give you my word that if you deceive me again and are not at Aline's at nine o'clock, I shall pack up my things to-morrow and go. I have enough of this, I am tired, I do not want to stay any longer if you run about all day alone and pass your nights no one knows with whom, drinking. Do you hear, Michail?"

"I hear, Nathalie. . . . Rest assured, I will be at *petite* Suzanne's with Valouieff at ten o'clock sharp."

Gaily humming a little song, Michail kissed his wife's hand and, glad to have got off so cheaply, disappeared hurriedly.

At four o'clock Nathalie went to Aline's. After the private theatricals which had played so great a part in her life, Aline had for a long time not given any news of herself. Over a year had passed when Nathalie received at last a letter from her, enclosing the sum of money that Nathalie had once lent her. In her letter Aline told her friend that her life was quite changed, that her love for Prince Bibiche was so great that she had decided to compromise with her conscience. Nathalie had answered this letter, but the correspondence soon ceased, as Nathalie hated writing letters. Now she was very glad to see and have a good talk with her old friend. That day she was feeling very heavy-hearted; the glitter and whirl of the sumptuous hotel, the noise and movement in the streets, oppressed her still more. During her morning conversation with her husband she had noticed particularly his flourishing appearance, his stately, powerful figure, his energy, and the joy in life which seemed to emanate from him. When he left her, she dejectedly proceeded to her morning toilet and gazed long at herself in the glass. Her face looked paler than usual; she was over-tired and troubled; the eyes had lost some of their lustre, and tiny wrinkles showed near them. She felt that she was looking faded, uninteresting, and the provoking beauty of her husband awoke in her a bitter and suspicious jealousy. In such minutes she was sorry she had not taken Marie's advice and remained in the country, leaving her husband free for two months. There she would have been more at peace; she would not be angered or troubled by the cursory and tender glances which women whom they met threw her husband. . . . She had caught his answering glances, which he seemed to give to each pretty woman, and could hardly restrain her wrath and despair. Now on this very day sparks of irrepressible gaiety had seemed to dance in her husband's eyes, while she felt inclined to cry, to flee from Paris, and hide in the country, where Michail had been so attentive and kind

to her. With such thoughts Nathalie set off to Aline. As soon as she crossed her threshold, Aline ran out into the hall and with a cry of joy threw herself into her arms.

"How glad I am to see you, Nathalie! Now, let me look at you, dearest. . . . You are looking tired, and so pale. . . ."

"Ah, I am so distracted, you cannot imagine."

"Again! . . ." Aline could not help ejaculating.

"Not again, but always. And you are just the same, even better-looking. How nice it is here! What a charming apartment! What taste! . . . How cosy everywhere . . . *un vrai nid pour des amoureux*," Nathalie said while they were traversing several rooms and stopped at last in a pretty little blue boudoir.

"That's just it, Nathalie: nothing is changed; we are as formerly—*nous sommes deux amoureux*," said Aline gaily. "I am perfectly happy and assured. The first year I suffered very much and feared for our happiness; now I believe in it and am not even jealous."

"My life is the same old torture!" Nathalie continued, seating herself on a low sofa all covered with silken cushions. "You saw Misha yesterday; tell me, how did you think him looking?"

"What a handsome man! He will turn the heads of all the French women," laughed Aline without noticing the quiver of pain that passed over Nathalie's face at her words.

"They will turn his; that is what I am afraid of. . . ."

"Nothing so bad in that—let him have his fling."

"No, Aline, you know that our views differ on this subject; let us not speak of it. I am feeling quite unstrung to-day as it is, and have come to you to find courage and calmness. Tell me rather of your own life and of yourself."

"Of myself I can say, Nathalie, that I am happy, that never has life seemed to me so beautiful as it is now, and that I do not regret having entrusted myself to the Prince."

"It might have ended otherwise."

"That is to say, you mean that he could have abandoned me long ago?"

"Certainly, Aline. Think how awful it would have been for you."

"But still I would have had the memory of past happiness. I remember how desperate I felt when I got your letter at that time, Nathalie. . . ."

"Was I not right? I knew that the Prince had always been against marriage, and I considered it my duty to warn you."

"You did right, and I knew what I had to expect, but still I do not regret anything."

Aline smiled, looking at Nathalie with happy eyes.

"Life has changed for me as in a fairy-tale. . . . I feel so happy, so wonderfully happy. We have no children. Why should I deprive the Prince of his fancied liberty? . . . Just the same, he does all that I want and he does it with pleasure. If you could know, Nathalie, how tender and faithful and devoted he can be to a woman! I very soon learnt to know his character, and when he understood that I was not going to be an impediment to him, but only asked for his love and kindness, he seemed to become still more attached to me. He spoils me so, he thinks so much of me."

"I should think so! You have sacrificed everything to him."

"No, Nathalie, I do not want to exaggerate. What have I sacrificed? A dreary, dull life without joys, without any interest. That cannot be called sacrifice."

"But your name? Your honour? Do these things not count?"

"Name, honour! . . . Nathalie, is it really so? I have neither children nor relations, except an old aunt who does not care at all for me. Have I lost my honour by loving the Prince with a deep, faithful and devoted love? Can you, can any thinking person, consider me less honest than Baroness Shellman, who changes her lovers without end, or than Nellie Garina, who deceives her good, kind husband first with one, then with another? I have thought long and painfully over these questions, and decided at last that happiness is dearer to me than anything."

"If you have found what you wanted, I am very glad for you, Aline. My life has turned out quite otherwise, and the farther it goes, the worse it becomes. I sometimes think that Misha has ceased to love me. . . ."

Nathalie poured forth with tears a long string of complaints of her life, full of torturing doubts and suspicions. Aline tried several times to point out to her her own faults towards her husband, but Nathalie only became more excited, and Aline was silent, and just let her have her say and ease her heart. The time passed quite unperceived, and it was about nine o'clock when they rose from dinner. On hearing that Michail would soon be there with his friend, Aline called up two of her own friends, one of whom was General Tistcheff, a comrade of the Prince's just arrived from Petersburg, and the other a wealthy landowner from the Volga regions, Pantchin, who always passed the winter in Paris. When ten o'clock struck and Michail did not put in an appearance Nathalie began to be agitated. She became *distraite* and answered at random when spoken to. The clock struck eleven. To divert her Aline proposed to go somewhere to supper and to let the concierge know where they had gone so that he would be able to tell Gourakin, when he would come for his wife. The landowner, a handsome blonde man who knew Paris very well, proposed that they should go to a Spanish restaurant which had just been opened.

In the exciting atmosphere of the night restaurant Nathalie's attention was diverted from her troubles, and she began to be interested in what was going on around her.

The large oval saloon had rows of tables along the side walls, and on these tables there were small lamps under bright coloured shades. The red velvet sofas were occupied by the guests. Here were ladies in modest toilets with their husbands and friends, mostly foreigners, and also the provocative, painted, very much *décolletées demi-mondaines* in bright and eccentric dresses. The master of the place, a handsome and high-bred-looking Spaniard in evening dress, went forward to meet each newcomer and

very politely showed him to a free table. From above the light streamed down from many-coloured little lamps amid garlands of flowers and leaves. An orchestra on one side of the saloon behind a row of columns filled the place with melodies which seemed to incite a sort of mad gaiety and devilry. In the middle of the room a Spanish woman, slim and supple as a snake, with a crimson fringed shawl draped round her body, wound and turned round her partner, a Spaniard, strong and lithe as if made out of steel, dressed in black trousers with a broad sash. With elasticity and rhythm his soles beat the time on the parquet, and it seemed as if in each step of the dance there was hidden either a furious jealousy or a mad passion. Each muscle, each nerve seemed to take part in the passionate dance, and the whole public was stimulated by it as if by an electric current.

Several couples one after the other executed the "jota," and each one seemed to give something personal, but equally stimulating and irresistibly passionate. Nathalie, not listening to what the General was telling her, and not noticing the beautiful Spanish woman in an enormous hat, with a splendid figure and eyes, sitting near, followed the dance with intense interest. Her eyes were glistening, her cheeks burning, her lips half open. Aline watched her with a smile. She was very pleased that Nathalie was carried away by the general gaiety, and forgot her husband. Happy-looking women with bright red lips and sparkling eyes were constantly moving past their table. They walked with a strange unnatural movement of the haunches and exchanged provocative and meaning jests with the men. The whole atmosphere of the room was strangely excited and exotic. Spanish was heard. The women were nearly all Spaniards.

"Ah! . . ." Nathalie cried suddenly.

Aline and the two gentlemen looked at her. She was quite pale; her face expressed suffering, even fear; her eyes were fixed immovably on the entrance door, near which the amiable host, tall and slender, with his head on one side, was saying something with a smile to a pair who were just

entering the saloon. Aline looked in the direction of Nathalie's eyes and shuddered. An exquisitely pretty, very young, woman in a bright green toilet, with very bare shoulders, and an ostrich feather which hung down on her neck, was making her way to one of the tables. Behind her came Gourakin. In one hand he held his hat, in the other a bouquet of bright-coloured roses. They passed farther down the saloon. The Spanish host, leaning with both hands on the table, was listening with a smile to what Gourakin was saying to him. When he moved away, Gourakin gave a careless glance around, and evidently not remarking the presence of his wife, leaned quite close to his lady and began to whisper something in her ear. Only Aline understood the meaning of what was passing. Both the gentlemen were looking with astonishment at Nathalie's changed face, as she sat looking fixedly and silently before her.

"Nathalie! . . ." called Aline in a low voice.

But the other did not hear her; her fingers, convulsively pressing her glass of champagne, were trembling visibly.

"Nathalie. . . . Let us go," whispered Aline, leaning towards her. "For God's sake, control yourself . . . you must not remain here."

"Please leave me alone. I shall not stir from here. I shall stay until they depart," answered Nathalie in a trembling voice, slightly pushing Aline aside.

"Nathalie, I implore you. . . . A dreadful scandal may ensue."

"Oh, I do not care in the least now whatever happens . . ." Nathalie laughed nervously and unnaturally. "Rest assured, I will control myself;" and with these words Nathalie, still laughing unnaturally, raised her glass. "Let us drink to love, messieurs—I propose to drink to love."

Both the men raised their glasses readily.

"Although my temples are getting grey, I am nevertheless always ready to accept this toast," said General Tistcheff, raising his glass with a smile.

"Aline, why do you not drink? Do not you agree with the General?"

Nathalie seemed to become more and more excited every minute.

"Enough, Nathalie," Aline said with a vexed expression. "You are not sincere. . . . We had better go. . . ."

"For nothing in the world! It is so gay here. . . . The whole atmosphere seems full of love. Here for the first time I have understood the force of real love, all its *worth*. . . ."

Nathalie laughed loudly. The beautiful Spanish woman near by turned and looked at Nathalie fixedly.

"Don't you think, messieurs, that for the sake of love one might sacrifice one's life, one might die? . . ."

Nathalie's voice sounded like the string of an instrument. Pantchin began to comprehend that something had occurred. He was listening attentively to Nathalie's words, and was on his guard.

"Why do you look at me so, Monsieur Pantchin? Am I not right?"

"I do not know of what love you are speaking. . . . If it is of the one that is here"—he gave a glance around with a smile—"then this love is not worth one sleepless night."

"And do not you think that here, just here, with these women who sell themselves, the best feelings of women—of wives—are trampled into dust—women who are willing to give up their lives for their beloved. . . . No, no, Aline was right when she reproached me for being insincere. I do not believe in love any more. . . . There is no love. Or, if it does exist, then men try to drown it in debauchery. . . . There is no love, there is only debauchery, gay and unconcerned. . . ."

Nathalie's voice broke; she did not take her eyes off Michail for a single minute. He continued to talk to his lady in a tender manner. He seemed very much taken up with her, and paid no attention to what was going on around him. Once, when Michail, in touching glasses with his lady, put his arm round her waist, Nathalie made a movement as if she would leave her place, but Aline stopped her in time by placing her hand on hers. It was getting late. Aline, very nervous, insisted that it was time to go

home; Nathalie, very excited and unnaturally gay, refused obstinately. Watching the least movement of her husband with feverish gaze, she suddenly stopped speaking, rose rapidly from her place, and, moving between the tables, followed Michail, who was leaving the room with his lady. Aline was thunderstruck.

"Please follow her at a distance," she begged General Tistcheff in her agitation. "I foresee a scandal. Nathalie is beside herself—the handsome gentleman with the lady in green is her husband, *le charmeur* Gourakin."

Tistcheff rose and, rapidly crossing the room, disappeared behind the heavy drapery of the door.

While Michail was putting on Marion Doré's luxurious ermine cloak, which he himself had given the well-known Paris beauty, and with a tender smile was gazing in her greenish-grey mermaid's eyes, someone pulled his sleeve sharply. Michail turned round. His wife stood before him. He did not lose his self-possession for a single moment. He looked at her with severely astonished eyes and wanted to pass by, but she stopped in his way.

"If you will not this very moment leave this vile creature and return with me into the saloon, then I . . . then I . . ." Nathalie said in a stifled voice.

"*Quelle est cette dame? . . . Qu'est ce qu'elle te veut?*" asked Marion Doré in a half-frightened voice, examining Nathalie.

"*Je te prie de monter dans la voiture et de m'attendre un instant; je te suis immédiatement,*" answered Michail in a quick whisper.

Marion Doré, gracefully picking up her rich train and showing her slim legs up to her knees, nodded to Gourakin, threw a mocking, provocative look at Nathalie, and began leisurely to descend the stairs, her light and graceful little figure reflected in the mirrors placed along the walls.

"Nathalie, I order you to go home this very second. In half an hour I will be with you and we will talk it out. Here we cannot speak. Be reasonable."

Michail pronounced this phrase in a restrained and mean-

ing tone. His eyes were burning with a wrathful light, but he seemed quite calm.

"No, I shall not go home. I am here with Aline, and I have been watching you all the evening. You will return with me to the saloon. I demand this. . . . Misha, I do not answer for myself. . . ."

"Nathalie . . . people are looking at us. . . . Remember the proprieties."

"Michail . . . this is the last time that I speak. . . ."

Nathalie's voice broke; her face was distorted with rage. Gourakin set his teeth, gave her his arm, and went with her in silence through the whole room to the table where Aline sat. The Spanish woman who sat near by tittered audibly. Aline, gazing at the approaching pair with frightened eyes, did not know what to say in the first moment. Gourakin led his wife to her place, kissed Aline's hand, answered Pantchin's bow, then made a general bow, and without saying a word turned and left the room rapidly. All this happened so swiftly and unexpectedly that when Nathalie jumped up to follow her husband he had already disappeared behind the drapery of the door. Aline held her friend's hand fast, preventing her running after him, and trying to win time to allow Gourakin to drive away.

"For shame, Nathalie! . . . Why such scandal? . . . Control yourself. To-morrow you will hear his explanation," she whispered.

Nathalie, understanding at last that it would be useless for her to run after Michail, sat with a pale face and fixed stare.

"I am tired. . . . Come home . . . take me home, please," she asked Pantchin.

Without another word she returned to the hotel, accompanied by Pantchin. Tistcheff saw Aline home; she was more angry than excited over all that had passed in the restaurant. She blamed Nathalie for not being able to control herself, for having made strangers witnesses of her family drama.

It was late next morning when Aline's maid opened the

door of her bedroom carefully and called her several times before she answered.

"There is a gentleman asking for madame."

"What gentleman? What time is it?" asked Aline, stretching herself lazily.

"He is the handsome Russian who was here the other day."

"Monsieur Gourakin?"

"Yes, madame. It seems he is in a great hurry."

"Very well. Help me to get up."

Aline jumped up hastily and proceeded to dress.

"Evidently Nathalie has made a terrible scene, and he has invented some trick," thought Aline, laughing inwardly. Putting up her hair and throwing an elegant morning gown on her shoulders, she came out to Gourakin.

"It seems yesterday's escapade has cost you dear, *cher ami*, if you are up so early. Or perhaps Nathalie has not let you sleep at all? She is capable of that. . . . But you *were* caught yesterday! I must admit, however, I was more frightened for you than for Nathalie. How is she?"

Aline spoke laughingly, seeing Gourakin very calm and bright.

"I do not know what Nathalie is doing. I have not seen her since yesterday's sally, and I am awfully angry with her. If I am wrong, she is insupportable. May I sit down, Alexandra Vassilievna? I will not stay long, as I am afraid that Nathalie will be coming to you, and I do not want to meet her."

"How, you do not want to meet her? Come, *cher ami*, do not invent any cause for a drama. You know that Nathalie is crazy."

"I have come to you to ask you to quiet her and advise her to return home to the country at once. I am starting for Nice to-day with my new fancy, and I will remain there until I have had enough of her. I hope that her charms will keep me prisoner a month. You may tell Nathalie whatever you deem necessary. I consider that I have the right to have a month's leave of absence for yesterday's

scandal. Advise her to let me go my way, otherwise my patience will be out."

"Your patience!" Aline burst out laughing. "If anyone must talk of patience, then admit that you ignore the very meaning of that quality, as you always do only what you like."

"I am very patient by nature. I know how to control myself, and therefore do not expect you to feel any sympathy for my feelings. Let it be so. Feel for Nathalie; in this case it serves me well. *Au revoir*, Alexandra Vassilievna, I am going. As all my wardrobe has remained at the hotel, I must spend my time in shopping before the train starts. I count on your friendship, *chère petite* Suzanne."

"You are incorrigible—a sort of devil is in you," said Aline, shaking hands with Gourakin. "I do not envy Nathalie."

"Are you sure?" Gourakin looked at Aline with merry glistening eyes.

"Anyhow, with me it would have been otherwise," said Aline provokingly.

"I think so too."

Gourakin kissed Aline's hand and departed, leaving behind him an atmosphere of joy and pleasure in life.

Without waiting for the arrival of Nathalie, Aline decided to go to her directly after luncheon. The thought of the impending visit oppressed her; she foresaw the despair and frenzy in which Nathalie would be.

However, the explanation was not so stormy as she expected. Nathalie, it seemed, had been expecting something much worse; she feared that Michail would not return at all, and when Aline assured her on her word of honour that he would return, she sobbed hysterically. She had passed the remaining part of the previous night in hopeless thinking. Tormented by jealousy and indignation, she at the same time experienced a mortal fear that Michail would leave her altogether. Now the tension of her nervous state was dissolving itself in tears of joy. She made Aline repeat several times her assurance on her word of honour

that she was not deceiving her, and that Michail had said he would return.

"But if he is carried away by his infatuation and leaves me altogether!" Nathalie asked, gazing at Aline with frightened eyes.

"Never! . . . You forget that your Michail is a terrible spendthrift. He will run through all his money and will be obliged to leave her. Marion Doré's appetite is too great. . . . And very probably he will throw her over much earlier. You know his impulsive nature: one cannot guarantee to-day what will be to-morrow."

"Yes, dear Aline, there is a grain of truth in your words; Misha is so much spoilt, he is so accustomed to squander money. . . . I sometimes think that if uncle had not left me his millions I would have been happier, because then Misha could not spend the sums that he is spending on suppers and women. You know the proverb: *L'appetit vient en mangeant.* It is very applicable to Misha."

"Well, I think that you are mistaken in this also, and do not know his character well. If he had not your millions, he would be making debts. Such natures as your husband's are averse to discipline; one must have much patience and firmness in dealing with them; you have neither the one nor the other, my dear Nathalie, and this is the chief cause of your family troubles."

"I have heard that—a hundred times I have heard it," cried Nathalie irritably, lifting a phial of smelling-salts to her nose. "I am not a machine, I am a live woman with nerves and tortured heart. I cannot be calm when I love and suffer."

"That means all will remain as usual: you will suffer, and he will do as he likes," said Aline, smiling, and rose to depart.

But Nathalie begged her with tears not to leave her alone and to pass the day with her. She sent for a carriage, and they went for a drive in the Bois de Boulogne. She hoped to meet Michail in the crowd. Aline had not deemed it necessary to tell her friend that he was going to Nice on that same evening with Marion Doré. To Aline's question

when she thought of leaving Paris, Nathalie answered in a very decisive tone that she would remain there until her husband returned to her. She would inform Marie of all that had happened, and as she did not doubt that Michail would not leave his aunt without news of himself, she would let him know Nathalie's decision to remain in Paris.

"I do not understand what pleasure it can be to you, Nathalie, to complicate in such a way this unpleasant story," said Aline with a shrug of her shoulders. "In your place I would immediately return to my children, and would let him know through Marie that I was very much hurt by his conduct. . . ."

"Do not try to dissuade me, Aline—it is useless. So long as Misha does not come back to me, I will not return to Russia."

That same evening Aline sent a letter to Marie in Tashooki, containing a detailed account of all that had occurred, but without telling Nathalie of this. She informed Marie that her nephew had gone to Nice with the beautiful Parisian *cocotte*. After sending that letter Aline felt quieter; she knew that Marie would find means to influence her nephew.

XVII

MARIE woke up very early. Although she had arrived at Nice from Paris late at night, she had slept little, her mind busy with the coming meeting with her nephew. On receiving Aline's letter she had decided to start at once with the children to Paris and from there to Nice alone. In decisive moments Marie had inherited something of her mother's firmness of will and cool-headedness. In a few days all was ready. She found Nathalie in the most depressed state of mind. Her nerves completely unstrung from her sleepless nights, ill, she used to lie whole days on her sofa, giving herself up to her doubts and fears. Sometimes it seemed to her that weeks and months would pass in this way, that Michail would not return, and she would be waiting and suffering in vain. Then she used to send for Aline, not to be alone, and become quite desperate. The unexpected arrival of Marie and the children produced a favourable result, and she felt a little calmer and braver. She embraced Marie with tears of gratitude; she would not let her out of her sight, and like a little child she looked to her for protection and support. After staying in Paris three days Marie went to Nice. While passing, on her arrival, along the corridor to the chamber that she had just taken, she met a very pretty and exquisitely dressed young woman, with something indefinable in her movements which showed her to be a *demi-mondaine*. The thought arose in Marie's head that it might be Marion Doré, the object of the family trouble. The lively and gossiping chamber-maid soon told Marie that "*la belle dame du numéro douze est une cocotte de Paris des plus chic. . . . Et que le monsieur du numéro onze est un beau Russe très riche, et très aristocrate*"; and the maid's chatter

went on like a gay little stream while she was unpacking and arranging the things. In a very few minutes Marie was fully persuaded that the "*beau Russe du numéro onze*" was no other than her nephew.

The entire hotel was fast asleep; it was too early to go out. Marie opened the broad glass doors of the balcony looking out on the sea, and her room was flooded with the warm light of the rising sun. The sea, infinitely blue, with its rhythmically breathing surface, was sparkling, shimmering and softly splashing on the shore. Leaning on the rails of the balcony, Marie gave herself up to her thoughts. Last time she was in Nice, Michail had just left the Corps des Pages and had been promoted to the rank of officer. A wave of remembrances rushed over Marie. Already at that time she was not quite young, and had become accustomed to the idea that she was to be an old maid with no hopes of personal happiness. In the hotel where they had stopped she soon made the acquaintance of the Colonel of the Horse Guards regiment, Tistcheff. They had heard, her mother and she herself, that he was considered a great *bon-vivant* in Petersburg. Tistcheff proved himself to be a very pleasant companion, *bon causeur*, and a nice man. Marie could not explain how or why, but between her and Tistcheff special friendly relations had become established. She used to feel pleased when, sitting with her mother on the terrace of the hotel and on the quay, she saw the sturdy form of Tistcheff approaching them. When Marie lifted her eyes to look at him, she each time met a kind, attentive gaze, which seemed as if it had something to tell her. One day Tistcheff said that after knowing her he had begun to believe in the ideal of a woman's purity, which he, imbued with the uncleanliness of a worldly life, did not dare approach. Marie had blushed, and wanted to say something, but her mother had appeared on the terrace and she could not speak. A new feeling of deep sympathy and warmth had begun to be born in Marie's heart in relation to Tistcheff, who obviously sought for occasions to see her and to speak to her. And then quite suddenly her mother had ordered the servants to pack their things and

they had departed. Her mother had said good-bye to Tistcheff very coldly, and had not asked him to call on them in Petersburg. A long time had passed when, in recalling one day their sojourn in Nice, Mme. Gourakina had said to her daughter with a smile:

"I would consider myself an unhappy mother if my daughter had consented to marry Tistcheff, that empty and light-headed *bon-vivant.*"

Marie remembered how she had blushed and felt confused on hearing her mother's words. She had kept silence, but in her heart of hearts had held quite another opinion of Tistcheff. A delicate feeling whispered to her that Tistcheff might have changed, might have given up drinking, if he knew that a loving heart was suffering and aching on account of these bad habits. From Nathalie Marie had heard that Tistcheff was in Paris now. Something had again quivered in her heart. A meeting was possible, but with a sad thought of her age Marie conquered the wish of her heart and went off to Nice.

When the hotel began to show signs of life, Marie went down into the garden, passed on to the empty quay, took a few turns on it, and came back to the hotel. Having breakfasted and read a few pages of "Imitation de Jésus Christ," she wrote a note to her nephew, asking him to come to her. She sent the note with the servant and, trying to be calm, she sat down to wait for him. Five minutes had hardly gone by when a light knock was heard at the door, and at the same time it opened and Michail entered with a smile which illumined his mobile face with gladness.

"Aunt Marie, dearest, I never expected you." He embraced Marie and kissed her hand several times.

"Are you glad to see me?" asked Marie, smiling, not expecting such a warm greeting under the circumstances.

"Certainly I am glad—awfully glad. . . . How are the children?"

"I have left them with Nathalie in Paris."

"And came on yourself for me . . . to save the prodigal husband."

Michail laughed merrily and unaffectedly.

"Do not joke, Misha. . . . Really it is all very wrong and sad. Nathalie is looking very much altered; she is quite ill. . . . Mimi is grieving at being separated from you, and is often seen crying."

"Does Nathalie know that I am in Nice?" asked Michail, who had become suddenly serious after hearing Marie say that his daughter was grieving.

"Nathalie knows that I have gone to you, but where I did not tell her."

"You did well, Aunt Marie. Really, you are the only person who understands me completely. Only with you I can be quite myself. Do you know what? I'll go down directly and tell them to let us have a carriage, and we shall go away somewhere for the whole day. I will show you some beautiful places. On the way we shall have a good talk, and all unpleasant subjects will be less so amid the wonders of this glorious country."

Michail left the room. Marie, smiling, followed him with her eyes.

"What a fascinating man!" whispered she, "and what a pity it all is! . . ."

Michail soon returned, and they went down into the hall. The servants bowed deeply as they gave way to the generous rich Russian aristocrat, who threw the gold pieces right and left, just as if they were centimes. When the well-turned-out carriage drove away along the alley leading from the sumptuous entrance to the hotel, on one of the balconies of the lower story stood a young woman in a transparent rose-coloured morning gown, with painted eyes and carmined lips. She had an angry look in her greenish mermaid's eyes as they followed the disappearing vehicle.

Two days afterwards Gourakin settled the mad totals of his expenses, bade a tender good-bye to Marion Doré, and started for Tashooki.

Marie returned to Paris, and from there, with Nathalie and the children, also started for home.

Among other things, while speaking with her nephew of the estates, Marie informed him of the sale of a large portion of the Riazan estate in his absence by Moissei

Borisovitch; she made him promise that Nathalie would never know that he had heard of this from her. Michail was frightfully angry; it became evident that Moissei Borisovitch had passed all bounds and that it was dangerous to trust him with the management of the property.

As soon as Gourakin entered the train, leaving behind him Nice, Paris, Marion Doré, suppers and revels, he at once forgot all about them, and all his thoughts centred in his dear home Tashooki. He thought out a plan for his discussion with Moissei Borisovitch in all its details, made plans for the planting of new forests, the construction of a new mill, and on what terms it might be leased. It seemed strange to him now that he could have remained away so long from his beloved work on the estates. About Nathalie he stubbornly refused to think. The thought of her created a sort of protest in him and at the same time a sense of a wrong done on his part, whereas the image of little Mimi moved him and awoke remorse. He arrived unexpectedly, not even having ordered the horses to be sent to meet him. Hiring a brake from the official at the post-office, he drove up to the closed gates which divided the park from the broad alley leading up to the court of honour. A servant in the kitchen, on seeing the master driving up, ran off to wake the guard, and in half an hour the whole establishment knew that the master had returned.

Gourakin passed the morning in the office and in the inspection of all the buildings. Moissei Borisovitch was as usual impenetrably serious and full of his dignity. Gourakin wished several times to challenge him with his deceit and falsehood, but he restrained himself for the time being. On the following day he went off to the Riazan estate. Three days later Moissei Borisovitch received a special telegram calling him there immediately, and a week after that the whole village and all the servants heard the news that the master had dismissed Moissei Borisovitch for dishonesty. Gourakin demanded that he should quit the estate in three days. Moissei Borisovitch calmly sub-

mitted to this demand, removed his things from the place, handed over the accounts and books to his assistant, bade a cold farewell to the employees, and started for Saratoff.

Nathalie, who was moving by easy stages, so as not to fatigue the little ones, arrived on the day following the departure of Moissei Borisovitch. Marie had persuaded her that she was to meet her husband quite simply, not demanding any explanations, and try to forget all that had happened in Paris. Nathalie had obeyed her injunctions, and the meeting passed naturally. Nathalie was glad that the terrible nightmare was ended, that they were all together again and would be alone until late autumn. She even had a kind of guilty look, whereas Michail, holding high his handsome, well-bred head, was, as formerly, unconcernedly gay and sure of himself. On the same day at dinner he told his wife of the steward's dismissal. Nathalie was carrying a fork to her mouth at the moment, but suddenly put it down again and looked at her husband with wide open eyes:

"You are joking! This cannot be. . . ."

"I assure you, and at the same time congratulate you that we are rid of that skilful rogue."

"But, allow me . . . Moissei Borisovitch is my steward, and I do not understand what right you had to dismiss him without my consent."

"The question here is not in the right, but in simple common sense, and, I beg you, Nathalie, do not get excited without any reason, and not knowing what the matter is."

Michail spoke quite calmly, but Nathalie was rapidly losing all control over herself. After hearing all the details of the sale of the forest Nathalie still continued to defend Moissei Borisovitch, assuring her husband that there was something in the whole transaction that Michail had not understood.

The dinner ended with a stormy scene: Nathalie even went so far as to accuse her husband of wishing to deprive her of the only servant who was devoted to her interests.

"I am very glad that papa has sent Moissei Borisovitch away. He is a bad man, and you should not be cross to

papa. . . ." From the other side of the table the sweet clear voice of ten-year-old Mimi was heard; the child was gazing at her mother with bright, wide open eyes.

"That is not your business, Mimi. Do not dare to interfere!" her mother rebuked her severely.

"There, you see, Mimisha thinks the same as I do, and Marie agrees with me, and Miss Jones, and all the servants. You alone go against the general opinion, and I really do not understand for what reasons. However, be that as it may, I will not take back that Jew and rogue, as I do not want to work feeling myself entangled in a web of deceit."

With these words Gourakin left the table, not desiring to continue the quarrel. Nathalie was very much disturbed by the dismissal of the steward, and was not on speaking terms with her husband for several days. A little more than a week later, one morning when Michail was in the office, a servant announced to Nathalie that the former steward desired to see her. Moissei Borisovitch appeared on the terrace, and after a very dignified greeting asked Nathalie to accord him half an hour's audience.

In the study, where he was received, Moissei Borisovitch spoke long and eloquently of his services to the estates in the lifetime of the late General Dounaisky and after his death. Michail Vladimirovitch's accusation had offended him so bitterly that he had considered it humiliating to justify himself, and he had waited for an interview with the owner of the estates to explain to her the whole affair. He had known very well that she was keeping the Riazan estate for the children, and if he had permitted himself to sell a small part of the woods without reporting it to her it was because he wanted to do her a pleasure by a profitable transaction as a surprise for her birthday. He had sold the lot in question for a high price and had in view to purchase for the same sum a much larger lot adjoining another part of the same forest. . . . Moissei Borisovitch very adroitly made Nathalie understand that the watchful control over his extravagance on the part of such a devoted and disinterested defender of her interests as himself was very

unpleasant to her husband. The interview ended by Nathalie requesting him to undertake the management of all the property again and to return at once to Tashooki. When Michail heard of this decision of his wife's, his rage knew no bounds. His voice rolled like thunder throughout the house. He banged his fist on the table, scattering some valuable Sèvres china knick-knacks, and told Nathalie she was a brainless and stubborn fool. On the next day he ordered his things and Mimi's to be packed and went off to his own estate, where he remained not a week but a whole month, to Nathalie's distress. From there he went on with his daughter to Petersburg, where the new house was quite ready and prepared to receive its owners for their new life in the capital.

In Petersburg Gourakin made known his wish to enter the service, and he soon obtained a very high post. He gave up his salary to the two poorest officials in the Department where he served. Nathalie thought this very foolish, and shrugged her shoulders with a grimace when speaking of her husband's extravagant habits.

"Seven thousand are not to be found lying in the streets, and it is very foolish not to profit by them," she said.

On re-entering upon his functions as manager Moissei Borisovitch came to Petersburg to present himself to Michail. He expressed his deep regret as to their "misunderstanding," asked Michail to forget it and to consider him his faithful servant. Michail listened to the words of the crafty Jew with his cigar in his mouth, his head held up haughtily, and with half-closed eyes, and without deigning to enter into any explanations, put an end to the interview by extending negligently two fingers of his hand by way of good-bye. Moissei Borisovitch buried still more deeply in his heart his rancour against Gourakin, and decided to await patiently the moment of repayment.

In the Petersburg house, as in Moscow, the household was divided into two parts. In the reception-rooms there were, as formerly, dinners, balls, private theatricals and routs; in Marie's apartments life went on like a wound-up bit of mechanism, smoothly and evenly from day to day.

Mimi, loving her father with a rapturous adoration, gave the rest of her love, which her mother had not known how to win, to her aunt. She admired and was proud of her father, but she was wholly frank and open only with her aunt, who watched so carefully the development of her tender, fragile organism. Mimi was painfully sensitive, and it seemed that nothing passed unperceived by the searching gaze of her large thoughtful eyes. Without being able to express it in words she seemed to understand the psychology of both her parents.

"Poor mamma is again not in a good temper," she would say to her aunt. "I will not go to her; I had better remain with you, auntie, and work, and when papa comes home I will go to him in the study. . . . Papa is always in a good temper, and everyone feels happy near him. He is like the sun: as bright and kind. All love him. Is it not true that my father is wonderful? And you also, auntie—you love him more than mamma."

Marie would carefully avert such conversations, but she had to admit inwardly that Mimi instinctively had a premature and correct insight into things. Little Boris, a favourite of his mother, was growing up a lively and playful child, giving no trouble to anybody. Marie was becoming more and more attached to the children with every year, and her life was full of care and anxiety for them. As when she had lived with her mother, the years full of cares for others rolled over her head without bringing her personal happiness, and meanwhile her smooth hair was getting grey, her figure was beginning to get stout, and small wrinkles had long ago appeared round her eyes. Marie was conscious that old age was not far now. She looked forward without a murmur to this sad autumn of human life, and bore her joyless fate meekly and without murmuring.

PART THREE

I

TEN years passed. Marie Gourakina, grown stouter, her hair showing silver threads, her whole appearance strongly reminding of her mother, was sitting in a large armchair and carefully sewing in a bit of elastic to the edge of a pair of long white ball gloves. Light rapid footsteps were heard, and Mimi, fresh-looking and remarkably pretty, her cheeks red with the frost, entered the little drawing-room where Marie was sitting. She had not yet divested herself of the little sable cap which was so well suited to her fair hair. In her tailor-made blue costume, tall, slim, she was very good to look at; her movements had a certain inborn noble grace, and her dark blue eyes were soft and thoughtful. There was not a shadow of resemblance to her mother, or to Gourakin, whom she continued to love with a sort of adoration.

At Mimi's entrance Marie gave her a fond look.

"Cold, Mimi?"

"No, auntie, the weather is splendid. I would have walked a little more, but poor Miss Jones was quite frozen. My dress is a dream! Even Miss Jones praised it. Madame Josephine promised to send it by five o'clock. On the quay we met Tchagin; he says to-night's ball promises to be very brilliant. Do you know, auntie, I will be glad to dance to-day. After the quiet of the country it is so pleasant to plunge into the fun of the capital."

"Here are your gloves ready. Take them to your room, Mimisha."

Marie handed the gloves to her niece. Mimi embraced her aunt.

"What a pity, auntie, that you do not go to balls with me! I would be happier still."

"I should fall asleep there, my dear," Marie said with a smile. "I was very young when I left off going to balls; I never liked dancing much. . . ."

"Oh, auntie, how can one not like to dance! I always feel my heart beating quite particularly just when I enter a ball-room. The music, the lights, the flowers, the ball dresses, all look so pretty, everyone's eyes glistening; one floats along the parquet as if one had wings, and all the faces, all the words, seem quite different. For instance, Tchagin, auntie mine: he is not handsome, but in a ball-room I look at him and I admire him. He is so tall, so slender, fresh-looking, elegant, somehow quite new."

"Come, come, Mimisha, what nonsense!" laughed Marie. "If Alexander Alexandrovitch is good-looking at a ball, then the other men must be simply beauties."

"Well, I see you do not believe me, auntie, because you do not frequent balls, but ask Kitty Orlova—she says just the same. And papa! Papa is simply magnificent. I see how everyone looks at him. When mamma does not go and I enter a ball-room on his arm I feel a tingling all down my back from rapture and pride."

"Is mamma going to-day?" asked Marie.

"No, auntie, I am going alone with papa, and—I will whisper it to your ear, auntie—I am so glad!"

Marie shook her head good-naturedly and reproachfully.

"It would be better if your mother would go with you."

"Why so?"

"Papa spoils you too much."

"And you—do not you spoil me?"

Mimi smiled slyly.

"That is just what is bad: that everyone spoils you."

"Not bad, but very good, and you, my auntie, are a darling, and I adore you. . . ."

Mimi kissed her aunt and, sitting down opposite her on the sofa, took up one of Miss Jones's everlasting scarves of orange wool for the poor, and continued to chatter gaily:

"Auntie, tell me the truth: what do you think of Tchagin?"

"What can I think of him, Mimisha? A nice, good man and nothing more."

"No, no, tell me something more. I know that you are thinking something else and are silent on purpose."

"I am not thinking anything. . . . There is nothing to think about."

"Ah no, there is, there is, there is! You will not say on purpose."

"What is it I do not want to say?" asked Marie, smiling.

"That Tchagin is in love with me, and that you are afraid that I will fall in love with him."

"What nonsense! If Tchagin, as you say, is in love with you, I do not think for one moment that you can fall in love with him. It would be absurd."

"Why not? There is something dreadfully interesting in him."

At the word "dreadfully" Mimi shut her eyes for a second and, putting her work aside, leaned both arms on the table.

"He is not like all the others. Kitty Orlova assured me that he is a mystic and something of a freemason."

"All that is very well, but he is too old for you, my dear."

"Not at all. You told him yourself that his soul is young. And you were right."

"If so, then marry him," said Marie, laughing.

"How, auntie!—you consent to that?"

"Yes, I consent, because I do not doubt that Tchagin loves you as the daughter of his friend, and will never pass that limit."

At this moment a servant from the other part of the house appeared at the door.

"Boris Michailovitch ordered me to say that he cannot go to the skating to-day."

"Ah, what a pity! . . ." cried Mimi in a displeased voice.

"Is my brother at home?" she asked the man.

"No, miss; he has just gone out."

"It is dreadful; Boris is never at home now," said Mimi to her aunt, when the servant had gone. "And do you know, aunt, that horrid Moissei Borisovitch connives with him in a dreadful way."

"How can he connive with him?"

"I will tell you, but, please, it is a secret. He procures money for him, and I know from Boris himself that not long ago Moissei Borisovitch got him one thousand roubles, which Boris spent in a fortnight."

"Can that be true, Mimi? Wherever can he spend so much money? Since autumn papa and mamma have allowed him five hundred roubles a month."

"Boris told me that since he has been promoted officer he has many necessary expenses."

"However, his father received the same allowance of five hundred roubles a month, when at his age he served in the same regiment, and he managed to get on with it. Moissei Borisovitch is acting very wrongly in giving Boris such sums without the knowledge of his parents."

"Moissei Borisovitch does still worse: he sets Boris up against papa. . . ."

"Ah, what a dreadful man!" cried Marie anxiously. "What does he tell him?"

"He tells him that all his life papa has squandered money on suppers and amusements, and that if there is anything left then it is only owing to mamma and her struggle against papa to retain Moissei Borisovitch, who has always guarded mamma's interests and saved her fortune from papa's extravagance."

"But how dare he speak so! How can Boris listen to him?"

"I said so to Boris. A few days ago he asked papa for some money and papa gave him two hundred roubles above his allowance. Boris was very angry that papa did not give him five hundred, and turned directly to Moissei Borisovitch. Instead of persuading Boris, he set him up worse against papa and procured him the thousand roubles."

"How very dreadful!"

Marie was greatly agitated.

"I am surprised that mamma does not see anything, and trusts that horrid Jew so much. Besides speaking disrespectfully of papa he tells lies. Boris asked mamma for some money once, and she refused him. Moissei Borisovitch assured Boris that mamma had refused because papa had persuaded her not to give the money. And I know for sure that that is a lie, because at luncheon papa was persuading mamma in my presence to give Boris his part of the fortune, so that in entering the regiment he would feel quite independent. Mamma objected, and they quarrelled. And Moissei Borisovitch represents papa in a false light, and assures Boris that papa will squander all the money."

"Did Boris tell you that?"

"Yes, he told me the day before yesterday."

Marie shook her head slowly, and was silent several minutes.

"This cannot be left so," she said thoughtfully. "Moissei Borisovitch is sowing discord in the family. Boris's eyes must be opened. I will ask you to tea to-morrow evening and will lead the conversation to this subject. I always considered Moissei Borisovitch a dangerous man, but I never thought that he would be capable of such baseness."

All the evening Marie remained under the impression of her conversation with her niece. She remembered now small but significant facts in Boris's conduct, his arguments, his critical attitude towards his father's actions. Marie used to restrain her nephew, but without laying special stress on his sallies, which she ascribed to his youth and undisciplined nature, which was such a contrast to his sister's.

The last years Marie had suffered very much. She saw that Michail's family life was an irreparable failure. Nathalie loved him as formerly, and was jealous of him, but now jealousy was taking a sharp, often rancorous turn. Michail, who used to control himself so well formerly, now not only lost the capacity of keeping his head in his quarrels with his wife, but frequently flew into such a frenzy of rage that Marie, listening to Nathalie's complaints, used to be quite horrified, and vainly implored her to beware of stirring the

lower side of his nature. As an onlooker she saw clearly that Michail was losing patience, and might be carried away so far by his passion that he might overstep certain limits, after which there could be no return possible.

For Gourakin, who had always been spoilt by women, his wife's cavilling and spiteful rancour were simply unbearable. Little by little the family had divided into two camps: Nathalie and her favourite Boris, and on the other side Michail and his devotedly adoring Mimi. In the parents' quarrels Boris always took his mother's part, and often showed his displeasure with his father by a moody silence and angry looks from under his eyebrows. Mimi carefully hid her suffering and displeasure with her mother and only tried to prove her sympathy with her father by marked tenderness. Marie observed in silence this sad discord, but she never even thought that Moissei Borisovitch's enmity towards Michail would be used to fan the son's enmity to the father. Boris, very much like his father in appearance, was like his mother in his character. He was narrow-minded and suspicious. Accustomed to luxury, he spent money without counting, but extravagant when it concerned himself, he was stingy for others; he held long and frequent conferences with Moissei Borisovitch, finding out from him all about his parents' money affairs; he took his mother's part, not so much out of love for her as from egotistical reasons; he knew from the steward that his father's fortune amounted to hardly the tenth part of his mother's enormous wealth.

On the day following the ball Mimi and Boris were taking tea with their aunt. Mimi was relating with enthusiasm her impressions of the brilliant gathering. Boris, who had slept badly, was yawning, and spoke little.

"And you, Boris—did you enjoy it?" asked Marie.

"Very much. The ball was a success, and the ladies cannot complain of me; I hardly sat down a minute."

"Especially one lady," said Mimi, laughing. "He danced nearly all the evening with Mika Bestoujeva."

"Well, she is very nice"—Boris seemed slightly confused.

"Oh, very, very . . . such a beauty," Mimi caught up

warmly "Do you know, auntie, her mother is in love with papa; I have heard it from many people."

Boris frowned; Marie was silent. Mimi's naïve remark touched upon the subject of many scenes between her parents. Mimi did not know that her mother had ceased for some time to appear at parties where she might meet the lovely, youthful-looking, gay coquette, the mother of Mimi's friend, Mika Bestoujeva. Michail Gourakin paid his tribute to the fascinating, worldly woman, and in the frequent meetings with her found a rest from his family scenes. Although Michail was very careful, this liaison had not remained undiscovered. Nathalie's friends had hastened, for the sake of their friendship, to inform her of her husband's new infatuation. Nathalie, never very disciplined in her fits of jealousy, was now in a terrible rage. The passing years were laying their cruel hand on her outward appearance, whereas Michail, although his hair was beginning to turn grey, still remained the same singularly handsome man, and Nathalie saw that the years did not diminish the number of women's hearts ready to burn with a bright flame in answer to their fascinating favourite. Marie had known of this new drama of Nathalie's for some time, Boris only a short time; he now looked intently at his sister, as if wishing to see whether there was a deeper significance in her words; but Mimi's eyes were bright and gay. She spoke of Bestoujeva's love as of one of the trophies of her father, of which she was justly proud.

"Mika's mother is in love with papa," she continued naïvely, "and Boris is in love with Mika."

"In love—that is going too far," smiled Boris.

"Most certainly in love, and Mika, also, I think, is in love with you. I would advise you to marry her in time; she is such a darling. If she has not enough money, it need not matter to you—you will be rich."

"Well, that is not certain," said Boris in a mocking tone, stretching out his crossed legs and putting his hands in his pockets.

"How do you mean, not certain? Your parents will without any doubt leave you their fortune," said Marie

calmly, feeling that in her nephew's words there was a hidden thought.

"It has happened that even with larger fortunes than ours, the children have had nothing left them," said Boris, not changing his position and without looking towards his aunt.

"I really do not understand you, my dear."

"As if you did not know my father, aunt! His wastefulness is known to all Petersburg."

"Wastefulness is not right. Your father spends very much because he is able to do so, and if, after living over twenty years with your mother, he has not, as you say, 'wasted' her fortune, then who can suppose and foretell that he will do so now?"

"Those who know him well, they say so."

"But, Boris, who, even knowing him very well, can balance his revenues and expenses, to come to such conclusions? You are just beginning life, have but begun to receive your allowance, and already you spend more than five hundred roubles a month, and are even making debts, although you are provided with all the necessaries of life, and you blame your father, who you know is obliged to spend much to keep up the style of your way of living. Your father has a rich and generous nature, and you have more right to be proud of him than to blame him."

"It is mostly such generous natures that squander their millions," answered Boris irritably.

"Are not you ashamed, Boris, to speak so of papa?" Mimi broke in hotly. "Everyone who knows papa intimately adores him."

"Nothing surprising in that, when he feeds them, and amuses them, and lends them money without ever getting it back."

"You are talking nonsense, and I will not listen to it."

Mimi said good-night to her aunt and went to her own room.

Marie remained with Boris and continued the conversation. For the first time Boris spoke out to his aunt about his father. He accused and blamed him for all—for the

embittered character of his mother, and his wastefulness, and his constant infatuations; he even blamed him because he did not occupy himself with his mother's affairs, but left them all to the steward. Marie listened to her nephew with rising bitterness. Moissei Borisovitch's revenge had succeeded: he had been able to set the son against the father so well that even the defence of the latter by the aunt who had known him from his cradle was of no avail. Marie tried to open his eyes, tried as far as she deemed it possible to explain his mother's confidence in the false and crafty steward, the antipathy, so easy to understand, which his father's straightforward nature felt towards this man, the latter's spite against him, and its results.

Boris remained deaf.

"You, aunt, are partial towards my father, and see his actions in a favourable light, but I am wholly on my mother's side, because I see my father as he is, and not such as he appears to you."

"Enough, enough, Boris," Marie said. "You are wrong to say such things. Without taking anyone's part, you must respect and love your father and mother. You are blind, and will not see what a precipice this base, sly Jew is digging under the feet of your father, whom he has served for over twenty years."

"He served my mother, not my father."

"Enough, Boris. I am deeply moved by what I have heard from you, and I see that Moissei Borisovitch has managed to influence not only your mother, but yourself also."

Boris smiled a wry smile, coldly wished his aunt good-night, and went off.

All that night Marie did not close her eyes

II

In a large private room of a first-class restaurant the company of artists invited by Gourakin was in that elevated frame of mind which is easily called forth by music, wine, and the society of interesting women. On the large round table stood many half-filled glasses. The men in evening dress, the ladies in low-cut gowns, with their laughter and merry intercourse quite drowned the sounds of the orchestra which were borne in from the general *salon*. Michail Gourakin, a little stouter, slightly grey on the temples, with the same eagle's glance of his handsome eyes, and a certain authoritativeness in his look and manner, was sitting in the centre of the assembled company. Leaning against the back of the chair, with his legs crossed one over the other, he was listening with a smile to the picturesque and flowery speech of the impulsive Italian singer. The tenor Spada, gesticulating and speaking half French and half Italian, was pointing out to Gourakin the most advantageous places in the tenor's part in the musical comedy composed by Gourakin and presented that evening to the criticism of the artistic company.

"*Veramente un pezzo bellissimo!*" tenor Spada was saying in immoderate praise of the work, which was not without a spark of talent of the aristocrat art-lover, always ready to throw hundreds and thousands of roubles on the stage. A well-known musician, whose occupation was to accompany singers on the piano during concerts, came up to the piano and began to turn over the leaves of the manuscript.

"May we continue?" he asked Michail.

"If you please. Signora Rizio," said Michail in Italian to a gorgeous and dark-eyed brunette, "we are going to try the mezzo-soprano part; will you help us?"

Michail's glance rested on Signora Rizio, accompanied by a caressing smile, and the impulsive Italian, feeling its magic power, blushed slightly.

"*Con piacere, caro signor.*"

She went up to the piano, took the music which the pianist handed her, hastily ran her eyes over it, and asked him to begin. All were silent and listened with attention to the pretty light melody which was issuing from the mouth of the singer in low velvet tones. Michail, laying aside his unfinished cigar, threw his head back, and with the expression of a dreamer, gazing into the far distance, seemed to forget all his surroundings.

"*Molto bene,*" the tenor Spada announced in a loud whisper, but Michail did not hear him; the melody created by him seemed to lull him and carry him away, and at that moment he was indifferent to the judgment of others.

From the depths of the room a pair of woman's eyes were fixed on Michail with a burning fixed gaze. They were the eyes of a young artist just arrived from Italy, where she had completed her training, and had been invited through a third person to this assembly to become acquainted with the soprano part, which she was to sing at a grand concert given in Michail's house. Gourakin, who had never liked to initiate the indifferent Nathalie into his artistic efforts, now kept them quite secret to avoid vexatious questionings and suspicions. Mimi alone was aware of the fact that her father was intending to find performers to execute his work. As in all other things, she completely sympathized with the idea, and had learnt by heart all the best melodies of the short opera. Nathalie had heard that her husband had "composed something," but had never inquired what it was. Michail had become accustomed a long while to his wife's indifference towards his personal interests; he ignored her with a cold contempt, and did not even inform her of his having invited the artists to a restaurant to acquaint them with his music. He did not invite them to his house because he foresaw that she would be displeased.

"I detest to have those artists in my house," she had

often told her husband. "Your love for them is a craze which costs much too dear."

Each artist or actress invited by Michail to their house seemed to Nathalie to be a leech come to suck away a part of her fortune. The more Michail was carried away with them, the more she hated them, especially the women, as she was sure that her husband spent his money on them, and they gave him their love in return.

Michail's infatuations had not ceased as the years went by. Just as when he was young, he never did anything by halves: he either took no notice of people or he loved them with a generous love. All that had anything to do with the arts found an echo in his soul; he spent large sums in the support of talents without any thought of gratitude or popularity, and therefore he was adored by this class of persons.

At this moment, carried away by his impressions, Michail in an unconsciously picturesque attitude attracted all the looks of the company, who thoroughly sympathized with him.

"What a noble profile! . . ." the wife of the pianist said, bending down to the ear of the young singer, who was gazing at Michail with enraptured eyes.

"Wonderful!" answered the other one without withdrawing her eyes.

"That is a real hero of a novel, is not he?"

"Oh yes! For such a man one could do anything. I see him for the first time, but I feel that if he but say a word I shall be ready to forget everyone and everything for him. . . ."

Whether these words reached Michail's sense of hearing, or whether his action was unconscious, but he slowly turned his head towards the speaker and looked at her with a smile.

"Are you pleased?" he asked, thinking of the music.

"Not only pleased, I am enchanted," the singer answered impulsively, thinking of her own thought.

Michail slightly bent his head in acknowledgment and looked again at the lovely artist. Their eyes met, a flash

of fire passed with lightning quickness from her to him and back again, and Michail with a dumb feeling that was partly gratitude, partly a caress, answered her thoughts with a second's eloquent burning glance. He was so accustomed to these dumb avowals from caressing women's eyes, he loved them so, he was so grateful for them! . . . In his whole life he had not hurt a single woman's heart, except his wife's.

The pianist was playing the third and last act. It was late. Michail ordered oysters and champagne to be brought. The pianist, after playing the last chord, came up to Gourakin and with both hands extended:

"Bravo and bravo, Michail Vladimirovitch! Great musical intuition, originality, and melodies of a rare beauty."

"Michail Vladimirovitch in his musical fantasies, as in all else, is simply enchanting," said the pianist's wife, a well-known opera-singer, gazing boldly into Gourakin's eyes.

"You are too generous; I do not deserve this. . . ."

Gourakin, a whole head taller than the guests who crowded round him in a tight circle, listened with a good-natured, lenient smile to the praises that were pouring down on him from all sides. Signor Spada raised a glass of champagne high with a toast for *il gran' signore russo, pieno di talento e di buonta.*

Amid the laughter and merry talk no one noticed how the door of the room opened; Nathalie Gourakina stood on the threshold, in a black silk dress, with a magnificent silver-black fox fur on her shoulders. Holding her lorgnette to her eyes, the lids of which were lowered in a half-contemptuous fashion, her face pale, her nostrils quivering, she stood for a minute unnoticed by anyone. Michail was the first to catch sight of her. A lightning flash of wrath crossed his eyes, but he controlled himself and, moving back his chair noisily, he went to meet her.

"A-ah! . . . Nathalie. . . . Very nice of you to have come. Allow me to present to you my lenient critics and kind friends."

Nathalie extended the ends of her fingers with a con-

descending smile and continued to observe the ladies fixedly through her lorgnette.

"I did not suspect that my husband had such a large audience," she said with an artificial smile.

"Oh, Michail Vladimirovitch is so talented. He has been reading us his beautiful poetry," cried the young artist from Italy with eyes shining with enthusiasm, and not remarking the dissonance which had been felt in the company from the moment of Nathalie's appearance.

"Your husband is such a grand, such a wonderful man!"

Nathalie's nostrils quivered a little more, and her eyes rested with a cold and unfriendly look on the enthusiastic face of the speaker.

"How enraptured you seem! Or is it the wine, the music, and my husband's presence which have such an effect on you?"

The singer wanted to reply, but she stammered and looked in a disconcerted way towards Gourakin; he had not heard his wife's words, but her whole aspect told him that she was in a state of jealous excitement, which always led to a desire to say disagreeable and unkind things to all and anyone.

"If you intend to speak of music with my wife, then I would recommend you to change the subject of conversation," said Michail to the disconcerted singer, leaning his elbow on the table and turning towards his wife, in a loud and meaning tone.

"Take my advice, or else my wife will make you hear a lot of disagreeable things, as she cannot bear music."

Michail looked at the artist with a kindly smile; she raised her eyes to his with a rapid movement and lowered them at once as rapidly. However, Nathalie had time to read something in this passing movement of the eyelids, and her face began to lose its pallor and become diffused with hot colour. At this moment a group of artists at the piano were urging Signora Rizio to sing something.

She was refusing.

"Make her sing, *cher monsieur;* she will not be able to refuse you," said one of the Italian artists jestingly to Gourakin.

"Yes, yes, Signora Rizio, give us the pleasure of listening to your beautiful voice."

With these words Gourakin rose and moved towards the piano, where the artist was standing. At the moment when she, ceding to his request, was taking up the music and preparing to sing, Nathalie, pretending not to notice either artist or pianist, rose abruptly from her chair, with a graceful gesture caught up the fur which had slid off her shoulder, and with a rustle of her silken train and an unkind little fire in her eyes came up to her husband.

"It is very late, and I think that it is time for all of us to go home, especially as to-morrow at nine o'clock there is the *levée du corps* of Princess Yurakin, and we must not oversleep ouselves."

Michail clenched with all his force his fist, which was lying on the lid of the piano, and it seemed as if he wanted to dig it into the instrument. An imperceptible convulsion passed over his features and disappeared immediately.

"You have evidently not heard that Signora Rizio has consented to give us the pleasure of hearing her beautiful voice."

But Signora Rizio, with a look of offended dignity in her large black eyes, threw down the music which she held and said rapidly in French, addressing herself to Michail:

"Please do not trouble; I will sing to you with pleasure another time, and as much as you like. I do not like, and I do not wish, to sing in the presence of those who neither understand nor love music."

"You are not quite right," answered Nathalie haughtily with flashing eyes and letting loose her rage. "I like music at concerts and in the opera, but I cannot bear it amid the surroundings of a restaurant."

"*Ecco la grand'dama!*" Nathalie heard the mocking voice of the tenor Spada in an audible whisper.

Pretending not to hear him, Nathalie inclined her head slightly in a general bow and turned to go.

"Michail, I shall be waiting for you in the carriage." She turned round from the door and left the room.

Gourakin moved away from the piano and, breathing heavily, leaned his hands on the round covered table and looked around him at the company with eyes dark with wrath.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I must tender my excuses. . . . I did not expect this visit, otherwise I would have taken measures to protect you against this . . . wild outbreak, inspired, as usual, by a blind, unreasoning jealousy. Please excuse me, once again I beg you. . . . I feel myself offended not less than you. . . ."

Gourakin wanted to bring his fist down with all his force on the table, but with a tremendous effort of his will he conquered his longing. In repressing his boiling rage he suddenly felt a spasm in his chest, and caught at his heart. In a moment he was surrounded, placed on a chair; a glass of water was handed him.

". . . *Oh, povero caro signore . . . tanto gentile, tanto buono! . . . Calmez-vous, cher monsieur.* . . . For God's sake, do not agitate yourself. . . . We understand very well . . ." was heard on all sides.

Little by little Michail became himself again.

"Your Excellency," the respectful voice of the servant was heard, "Her Excellency begs you to come to the carriage."

"Tell Her Excellency to go home and send the carriage back for me."

Soon the company invited by Michail began to disperse. Champagne had been served once more and had helped to scatter the unpleasant impressions of the evening. The guests took a friendly leave of Gourakin, who managed to say to each of them something amiable and kind.

Returning home late at night, Michail was reflecting that he must avoid meeting his wife that night. He felt that the quelled wrath might break out into fury if he saw her, and the usual nightly discussions would be recommenced. Throwing his cloak to the porter, Michail, with his thoughts concentrated on the tactless and cruel sally of his wife, ascended the stairs to the second story. In the lower

story were the apartments of Marie, the children, and the spare rooms. Moving carefully along the parquet, trying to stifle the noise of his footsteps, he passed on to his study. His servant was instructed to lay his bed in the study each time that he went out in the evening. Michail put out the lamp which was burning in the *salon* and entered his study. Stumbling against the furniture, he passed on to his writing-table; he felt for the matches and lit the candles. The large, luxuriously furnished room was lit up with the quivering light, and trembling, hovering shadows. The bed with its white covering stood out in strong contrast to the general half darkness. Michail took off his smoking-coat and threw it on a neighbouring chair, then he yawned and stretched himself. His stately figure was reflected in a giant shadow along the wall and on the ceiling. He took a few steps into the room and stopped suddenly; in a low armchair, enveloped in the fur which she had worn that evening, in a white dressing-gown, her well-preserved hair flowing down her shoulders, sat Nathalie. Evidently she had been asleep and the light of the candles had awakened her. Michail, having regained his equanimity, remained silent, fearing to lose it.

"I have resolved to wait for you, Michail, to come to an understanding once and for all, and to protect myself and my family from your crazes; besides this, I . . ."

"Go away . . . go away this very second, and do not say another word. . . ."

Michail's voice sounded choked, and there was something threatening in his unnatural restraint, but Nathalie did not understand this.

"No, no, I have decided to lay before you the results of all the outrages that have been accumulating all these years," she continued rapidly, throwing aside her fur with a nervous gesture of her hand. Michail bent down to pick up the fallen fur, and then suddenly, in a movement of rage, threw it with all his force on a chair.

"Go. . . . Do you understand? Another word, and I . . . and I . . ."

"Oh, I have become accustomed to your rages long ago,

you cannot surprise me . . ." Nathalie smiled contemptuously. "I am going to speak to you on behalf of the children, for their future welfare. . . ."

"Nathalie!" burst forth from Michail in a hoarse, threatening whisper.

He was standing before her, his head slightly bent, breathing heavily and clenching his fists convulsively.

"I have become tired of all these half cocottes, half artists who hang themselves on your neck and extort enormous sums out of our capital, and I will find means to protect myself against your debauchery. . . . If it were only for the sake of your daughter, whom you have taught to take your part, and whom you spoil with your fancies and expenses—if it were only for her sake, you ought to restrain your base instincts. . . ."

"Certainly . . . certainly, were it not for Mimi, I would long ago have thrown over both you and this dastardly life under one roof with you."

"I know it . . . I know it very well. . . . You have managed to turn her head, and the last crumbs of love which belonged to me you have given to her."

"Yes, I have given her all, all of love and tenderness in my heart. Thanks to your evil character, nothing remains in my heart for you. . . . You are both pitiable and disgusting."

"You gave all to that girl? Ha, ha, ha! . . . *En voilà un amour sublime!* Repeat it, repeat it again. . . ."

Nathalie was beside herself. Hysterical laughter interrupted her excited utterances. She made two steps forward and, coming up quite close to Michail, reiterated insistently:

"Say it again. . . ."

"Yes, yes, yes. . . . I have given all my love to my daughter, and you . . . you I am beginning to hate."

"To your daughter! You gave your love to your daughter! . . . What a mockery of fate! . . . Mimi is Volynsky's daughter, not yours. I have deceived you. . . . Volynsky knows it as well as I. . . ."

Nathalie did not have time to end her speech. Like a wounded tiger, with bloodshot eyes, his face distorted by

rage, Michail with a powerful movement of his hand bent her down to the floor. In her vain efforts to free herself from his hand, which was clutching her neck like an iron vice, she tore her dressing-gown, which slipped down to her waist. The aspect of her bare, convulsively moving shoulders excited Michail's rage to the utmost limits of madness. Out of his breast issued hoarse, inarticulate sounds. Nathalie groaned, bent lower and lower down to the floor with the huge bearskin rug on it.

"Let go . . . or I will scream. . . ."

"Then scream, base, deceitful woman! . . ."

In an instant he had snatched a horsewhip which hung on the wall near a collection of rare firearms and, grasping the handle tightly, he began to rain down on Nathalie smarting, cruel strokes. The strokes fell on her back, her shoulders, her legs. Nathalie writhed like a snake, crawling about on the soft fur, and burying her face in it in her pain, clasping the legs of her maddened husband, trying to get hold of the whip. . . . But the burning fiery lashes continued to cut into her flesh without stopping. Nathalie had ceased to scream; she was howling in a hoarse voice, losing her reason under the merciless hail of the whistling lashes. Michail, with bloodshot eyes, saw in the trembling light of the candles how the cuts came out and swelled on the bare flesh, and he struck again and again, giving himself up to the intoxication of cruelty. Now Nathalie was moaning hoarsely; she had given up all resistance, and, clasping her husband's legs convulsively, she struck her head against them, nearly losing her senses with the pain. Her torn chemise had slipped off her shoulders, swollen, dark crimson stripes covered all her body, in some places blood was trickling. . . . And the cruel strokes fell and fell. . . . Nathalie was silent now, and lay without movement at Michail's feet. In the ensuing silence the hiss of the whip brought him to his senses. He opened the hand which was clutching his wife's neck, threw away the whip, and, thrusting his fingers among his thick hair, he bent his head back and remained standing so, not remarking how the minutes were passing. His thoughts were in a wild whirl.

A storm was raging in his brain and heart. Mimi, the child for whose sake he had married, for whose sake he had been bearing this hell of a life for over twenty years; Mimi, whom he had worshipped with the tender and proud love of a father; Mimi, who had illumined his life, who all these last years had been the only connecting link between him and Nathalie; Mimi was not his child! He had been rudely and cynically deceived in the most precious and deepest feelings of a father. . . . And Volynsky knew of this! . . . Probably Volynsky was not the only one to know it. . . . He had been befooled. . . . Mimi—Volynsky's daughter! Michail groaned. He felt choking. He pulled at the collar of his shirt, and the golden stud, together with the collar, torn off at one pull, fell far away on the carpet. Michail sank into an armchair and with his face bent on his hands remained a long time immovable, his eyes fixed on one spot. . . . Nathalie moaned weakly and moved. Buried in his thoughts, Michail did not hear her, and continued to sit in an attitude of the deepest despair. Meanwhile Nathalie, opening her eyes and perceiving her husband sitting immovably, came to herself. She wanted to raise herself, but the pain in all her body evoked another moan, which Michail did not hear. She fell forward again on the bearskin, and all the horror, all the terror and pain which she had gone through came back to her. With a tremendous effort she rose cautiously and sat down. An involuntary sigh of horror broke from her when in the trembling light of the candles which dimly lit the huge room she glanced at her half bare body; it was horrible, completely covered with swollen stripes of a purple-blue colour, crossing and recrossing one another; in some places the cuts were bloody. Her beautiful, well cared for body was quite disfigured and awful. Nathalie began to cry softly. Never, even in her childhood, had anyone raised a finger against her. She felt herself completely abased, humiliated, helpless and unfortunate. But instead of an outburst of indignation and anger, she felt rising in her heart together with the tears a passionate wish to embrace *the knees* of the husband whom she had so deeply insulted

and who had punished her so mercilessly and harshly for this insult. Overcoming her pain, she crawled to the arm-chair and embraced his feet. It seemed that he did not notice her touch, and he remained in the same immovable position.

"Misha . . . Mishenka . . . forgive, forgive me . . ." Nathalie sobbed in a stifled voice.

Michail raised his head. His face had suddenly acquired a sunken look and was very pale. The eyes, usually so bright, were dim and half closed. He made a movement as if to free his legs from Nathalie's arms, but she clasped them still tighter and pressed her face against them.

"Do with me whatever you like. . . . Beat me, torture me . . . but only forgive me. . . ."

Michail frowned with a sort of pained disgust.

"Leave me. . . . Go away! . . ."

"Mishenka, I crave your pardon at your knees. . . . Forgive me for having loved you with a wild, unreasoning love. . . . Forgive me that for the sake of that love I resolved to lie to you, and have lied to you all my life. . . ."

"You were wrong to deceive me, but you were still more deeply wrong when you disclosed your lie to me. . . . You disclosed it in the wish to trample into the dirt the only precious feeling that I have in my life—my love for my daughter. And for that I hate you, I despite you. . . . Your love for me is a base and low love; you see in me a man, a male, and not me myself, with my soul and my brains . . . and you could think that by trampling my feeling for my daughter in the dirt you could revive a particle of my love for yourself! . . . Oh no! . . . Your mean and unfeeling nature estranged me long ago."

"Misha . . . Misha . . . spare me! . . . Do not say such dreadful words. I will bear all, I will suffer all, but not your hatred. . . . I will submit to you, I will be your slave, your obedient slave, only forgive me, do not thrust me away. . . ."

"Ah, go away from here. . . . I cannot answer for myself; all is boiling within me. . . ."

"Give, give way to your wrath . . . pour it out to the

last drop on me. . . . There, take that horrible whip, beat me to death; I will bear torture, pain from you, only not hatred and contempt. . . ."

"A slave's nature! . . . Why did not I understand you twenty years ago? Evidently you always needed a whip. I did not understand this, and I have paid for it with my whole life."

Michail with a brusque movement freed himself from her arms and rose from the chair.

"I repeat to you—go away . . . I must remain alone."

Nathalie heard the inflexible note in his voice, and silently rose. Shuddering and biting her lips from the excruciating pain in her whole body, she was at the same time ready to kiss the imprints of the strokes which had been dealt by the hand of the man whom in an outburst of ungovernable jealousy she had mortally wounded. Catching hold of the furniture, moving along on unsteady feet, with head bent low, Nathalie, like a shadow, silently glided out of the room.

III

On the next morning Mimi, greatly agitated, ran into her aunt's apartments and communicated to her the strange news that her father had left suddenly, without saying good-bye to anyone, telling the servant that he had gone to his estate. Mimi wanted to go for an explanation to her mother; but Nastenka, Nathalie's grey-haired and worthy old servant, told her that her mother was ill in bed and would not receive anybody.

"Again she has hurt papa somehow," Mimi sobbed piteously, wiping the running tears from her eyes with the back of her hand like a little child. "Papa never went away without saying good-bye to me. Something grave has happened. Find out, my auntie, from mamma; she will surely receive you. Now, what could have papa done to her? Why does she always quarrel with him? . . I do not know what I would not do for father so that he might be happy and in peace. Where has he gone now? For how long? And he has not even said good-bye to me, not warned me. . . ."

And the tears flowed again from Mimi's eyes.

Marie sighed. Like Mimi, she understood that the sudden departure of her nephew and Nathalie's illness were the consequences of some grave quarrel. "Poor child!" thought Marie, looking at Mimi, who was standing by the window and gazing out into the street with tear-filled eyes. "They quarrel and she suffers."

"Auntie, will you go to mamma?" asked Mimi, not turning away from the window and not moving from her place.

"I will go, my dear; I will go directly after lunch," answered Marie, removing with her plump hands, very

much like her late mother's, the coffee-pot from the spirit lamp to the tray. "Sit down, Mimisha, and have some coffee."

"No, auntie, I cannot. . . . I feel so sad, so sad. . . ."

Mimi's voice broke, and she sobbed softly again.

"Do not cry beforehand; perhaps papa has had to leave on some important business. . . ." Marie tried to console her niece in a not quite reassured voice.

"He did not even say good-bye. That's what hurts," said Mimi in a broken voice, through her tears.

After lunch Marie went upstairs, where she went very seldom. Through the glass doors, before pressing the button of the bell, Marie saw the valet in a careless attitude filling his cigarettes with tobacco. Such an occupation in the vestibule proved that he was certain of not being disturbed. Rapidly covering the litter on the table, he opened the door and bowed respectfully before Marie, whom the whole establishment respected sincerely.

"Call Nastenka to me," ordered Marie.

"She is on duty near Her Excellency's bedroom. Please walk in."

The valet opened the doors into the saloon, which had been closed by him for fear that the smell of tobacco would penetrate into it. Passing through the saloon and two drawing-rooms, Marie entered a Chinese room. The middle-aged, sedate Nastenka was there working; on seeing Marie enter she rose from her chair.

"What has happened, Nastenka? Why is Nathalia Georgievna ill?"

"She does not say, Your Excellency. She rang the bell in the morning, but she did not allow the blinds to be raised, would not drink any coffee, and she is groaning all the time, and it seems as if she is crying. She will not allow anyone to go in to her, nor will she allow the doctor to be sent for. His Excellency left his study at daybreak, ordered Egor to pack the valise, and went off to the station. Egor says the bed had not been slept in, and the candles were burnt down to their sockets."

"Did not His Excellency leave a letter for me?" asked

Marie, becoming more and more persuaded that something grave had happened.

"No, Your Excellency. I looked over the writing-table myself, thinking there might be something for the young lady, but there was nothing. Egor said that the General looked very bad, as if he had become much thinner in one night. . . . I cannot even think what could have happened."

Nastenka shook her head with sincere contrition.

"Go to Her Excellency, Nastenka, and if she is not asleep tell her that I would very much like to see her."

Marie sank down in an armchair and gave herself up to her thoughts. Her face was anxious and sad. It was not so much Nathalie's sudden illness that disturbed her as the strange departure of her nephew.

"Please come in," Nastenka said, coming out of the bedroom on tiptoes.

The bedroom, with the heavy draperies of the windows closely drawn, and only the little lamp burning faintly before the ikons, seemed quite dark to one coming in from the light.

Marie stopped for a moment to let her eyes get accustomed to the darkness. Feeling her way step by step, knocking against a small table and overturning something on it, she crossed the whole room, and at last, espying the large bed under the gorgeous silken canopy, approached it. Nathalie was moaning feebly. Becoming accustomed to the dark, Marie saw her lying on her back, her arms extended along her body above the counterpane. She turned her head slowly towards Marie.

"Marie . . . sit down," said she in a scarcely audible weak voice.

"Nathalie, what's the matter?" asked Marie kindly, laying her plump warm hand on Nathalie's.

"Oh, Marie . . . I am so . . . unhappy. . . . I would like to die. . . ."

"But what has happened? *Parlez au nom de Dieu.*"

"Something terrible has happened, *chère* Marie. . . . I dread to think of it. . . . I cannot believe that it has all

been and is irreparable. . . . I am afraid . . . that Misha will not return any more. . . ." Nathalie began to cry; she wanted to reach her pocket-handkerchief, which lay on the table near by, and sobbed loudly.

Marie gave her the handkerchief and sat silent, in great anxiety, awaiting when Nathalie would be more calm.

"Marie . . . I am the most . . . the most wretched woman in the world," said Nathalie in a voice broken with sobs. "He hates me now. . . . A-a-ah! Marie, Marie . . . what shall I do, what shall I do!" . . .

"Nathalie, calm yourself. Tell me what has happened. Perhaps it is not so terrible as you think."

"Marie . . . last night in a burst of rage and jealousy . . . I myself do not understand how it happened . . . I told him the dreadful secret . . . that Mimi is not his daughter . . . but Volynsky's."

"A-ah!"

Marie, horrorstruck, both hands pressed to her bosom, seemed to have turned into stone. Several minutes a heavy silence ensued. Marie was crushed. It seemed to her as if someone's heavy fist had dealt her a blow on the head.

"You told him that . . . you resolved to tell him, Nathalie?" she asked in a low voice of despair.

"Yes, yes, Marie. . . . It was a moment of madness. . . . Yes, I told him. . . ."

"And he?" asked Marie in a low voice.

"Light the candle for a moment. And now look here."

Nathalie, stifling her tears and moans of pain, lifted one edge of the counterpane and showed part of her body, swollen with awful-looking, blue-purple stripes, like cords.

Marie gasped and, hiding her face in her hands, sank helplessly into her chair.

"My whole body is so disfigured, Marie. . . . There is not a spot untouched. . . ."

"How awful!"

"No, Marie. . . . I have forgiven him . . . I am ready to suffer the same tortures again this minute, if only he would forgive me, if only he would return."

Marie was silent.

"How do you think, Marie—will he come back?"

"I am so shocked with all that I have heard and seen that I cannot collect my thoughts, Nathalie. . . . I cannot say anything at present. I expected anything, but not this horror."

"And now you despise me, Marie?"

"I only pity you, Nathalie. You have done something awful and irreparable."

Now Marie understood why Michail had left without saying good-bye to Mimi, without leaving her a single line.

"Marie, I implore you, write to him, bring him back; you were always my good genius."

Nathalie stretched out her hand towards Marie.

"No, Nathalie, that is impossible. Give him time to think this over and to suffer. You have given a shock to all his feelings. I absolutely cannot foresee how he will be able to survive this awful discovery. . . . Poor Mimi! I am afraid that you have torn out of Misha's heart his tender love to his daughter."

"Ah, Marie, do you think I could stop to reason in those minutes! . . . And you, Marie . . . you are upset . . . indignant . . . hurt—for Misha."

"Let us not speak of me, dear Nathalie; I have long ago become accustomed to this idea."

"How! . . . You guessed?"

"I knew. . . ."

"From whom? Who could have told you?"

"Mamma and I knew it from Baroness Kern. I always feared that this secret would be disclosed to poor Misha. I was sure that you would be the one to guard it most faithfully, and now . . ."

After remaining a long time with Nathalie, Marie went down and shut herself up in her room. She remembered what sad presentiments weighed on all who loved Michail before his wedding. Everyone foresaw that he would not be happy, and these presentiments had been fulfilled; but that his misfortunes would reach such a climax no one had expected.

Although Marie knew her nephew so well, in this terrible

shock which had struck his self-love, his inborn pride, she could not foresee the results, and did not know what to do. An inner feeling whispered to her that the best would be to leave him quite alone for some time. In answer to Mimi's anxious questions Marie told her that a serious unpleasantness had arisen between her parents, that her father had gone away for a short time, and that it would be best not to trouble him with telegrams or letters.

Mimi listened to her aunt with bent head, and promised to wait patiently until her father would come home and not to write to him without her aunt's knowledge.

On the next day Marie decided to speak to Tchagin, Michail's best friend. She wrote him a note, asking him to call on her as soon as he could. Tchagin answered that he would come that same evening. All day long Marie was thinking over what she would say to Tchagin. Twice she went to see Nathalie and listened patiently and meekly to the same complaints against her fate and her unhappy love. Nathalie groaned and moaned from the pain of her scars, which seemed to swell still more, but not a word of indignation or offence against the humiliating chastisement did she utter. Marie was surprised how Nathalie, always so proud and self-willed, could bear this humiliation so meekly, how she could desire to see her husband at once. She sincerely pitied Nathalie, but she suffered only for Michail and poor Mimi, who felt so bitterly hurt by her father's unusual and incomprehensible coldness to her.

In the evening Tchagin arrived. He found Marie in the drawing-room before the large round table. Nearly all the furniture which had belonged to old Gourakina had been carefully transported by her daughter first to Moscow, then back again to Petersburg. Marie always tried to keep the same disposition of the things as in her mother's time. At the moment when Tchagin entered she sat, as in the far away olden days, near the same round table with the same dark red plush table-cover, and she was occupied in knitting a muffler for a poor sick child. The same bronze lamp in the form of a column stood in the middle of the table, and from under a large Empire shade illumined Marie's anxious

face as it bent over her work. Tchagin looked much the same notwithstanding the number of years that had passed over his head. Tall, spare and thin, he held himself erect, his hair had not turned grey, his gait was light. Only his small head seemed to have become smaller and his neck longer. The same soft, insinuating manner in his movements and voice, the same caressing, half screwed-up, short-sighted eyes.

"I am not late, Maria Arkadievna?" asked Tchagin, wiping the glasses of his pince-nez while coming up to her.

"No, no, Alexander Alexandrovitch, I have been waiting for you. I have held and driven away so many thoughts."

"Something unpleasant has happened?"

"Not unpleasant, but very sad. . . ." Marie's voice trembled.

"You frighten me. . . . Up there, naturally?"

"Well, certainly."

"Again a quarrel? Again Nathalie?"

"As always—Nathalie. . . . Misha went off to his estate early yesterday."

"Oh, then it's serious. And Nathalie?

"She has been ill for two days. . . . Ah, Alexander Alexandrovitch, if you only knew how this sad life of Michail's oppresses me! One lives as if on a volcano. And how this affects the characters of the poor children. If you had seen the look in the eyes of that poor child yesterday! How she suffers! I know you love Misha and all of us. Perhaps you will be able to find a way out. . . . But really I do not know how I am to tell you. . . . I do not doubt that our conversation will be a secret. Perhaps you will help me? You will guess yourself?"

"I think, Maria Arkadievna, that I will be able to make a pretty good guess if you will help me by a hint."

"The most terrible thing that Nathalie could do she has done. She told . . . she told Misha . . . about poor Mimi. . . ." Marie directed a searching gaze on Tchagin. "If he knows the secret of her birth he will understand of what I am speaking," she said to herself.

"What do you say?" Tchagin rose from his place in great

agitation. "Nathalie has avowed to him . . . now! . . . now! . . . No, that is beyond my understanding. . . . Or maybe I am wrong, I did not understand you?"

Marie bent her head sadly.

"You understood rightly."

"What a mad nature! To betray such a secret after twenty years' silence—it is . . . it is——"

Tchagin could not find words, and stopped with an expression of deep and sorrowful perplexity.

"And Misha? What did he say to this?"

"Do not ask. . . . He did a terrible thing. . . ."

"I can imagine. . . ."

"He is gone, evidently ran away from home not wishing to see his daughter. What will happen now? I am losing my head."

"I am afraid that he will not return to this house any more," said Tchagin sadly.

"I fear the same; you have guessed my thought. But Mimi will not consent to live without her father. You know how she worships him. What will come of all this? What a drama! If Nathalie has decided to break Misha's heart, we must any way protect the poor child's soul. It is not her fault. Ah, I fear for her, I fear for her very much! . . . She is so sensitive, so nervous, so delicate. Poor child! First they deprived her of one father, now they have taken away the other."

"Yes, the situation is tragic. I feel stunned. . . . I confess I cannot assemble my thoughts."

That evening Tchagin stayed a long time with Marie. Always reserved and even-tempered, impenetrable, Marie could not carry any more alone the burden of her grief over the unhappy family life of her beloved nephew. Tchagin knew very much of that life, and lightened Marie's confessions by short exclamations, as "Yes, I know that," or "Misha told me of that."

"Do you know what I have decided?" said Tchagin after a long silence. "I shall go to Misha. During these two days the sharpness of the pain has become blunted. There, down in the quiet of the country, we shall come nearer to

one another, and I know Misha will tell me all himself. And after that I will use all my influence to make him come back for Mimi's sake. I shall appeal to the nobler part of his nature."

"Yes, yes. . . . Use all your eloquence, be a good angel to our poor little Mimi. Misha has such a kind, such a generous heart; but there is a limit to everything, and I am so afraid that the limit is reached."

Marie was crying with soft sobs, blowing her nose every minute and smelling salts from a small crystal phial.

"Yes, the situation is an outrageously bad one. How true the Russian proverb is: 'A hunchback will be straightened only in his grave.' This miserable Nathalie was always unreasonable and unrestrainable in her youth, and has remained so. Her psychology is incomprehensible! To love a man to madness and suddenly to betray to him such a secret! . . ."

Tchagin spread out both his hands and looked at Marie in perplexity above his pince-nez.

"Nothing to do with psychology!" said Marie, shaking her head. "Extreme egotism and an unbalanced, undisciplined will. Mamma foretold all that to Misha."

Silence again reigned several minutes. Tchagin seemed to be deliberating about something, walking up and down the room, stepping inaudibly on the soft carpet; he shrugged his shoulders at times, then made a few gestures, then stopped at one of the little tables and absently took up one of the knick-knacks on it and turned it about in his hands. Marie had resumed her work. After knitting a few rounds she laid it on the table and raised her head.

"Do you know what I have decided? If Misha will not cede to your exhortations and come back here, then I will also leave the house, and take Mimi with me. This will be the best for her in all respects."

"I think you are right. . . . But don't let us forebode anything; perhaps all will be well, at least outwardly, because the inner life is so broken up by Nathalia Georgievna that it is impossible to mend it."

"Auntie, may I come in?" Mimi entered the room.

"A-ah, Alexander Alexandrovitch! I did not know you were here. I have been reading in my room all the evening, till my eyes are tired."

"I thought you were at one of your numerous friend's," said Tchagin with a fond look at Mimi through his screwed-up eyes.

Mimi shook her head slowly.

"No. I do not want to see anyone. I feel so sad. . . ."

"You did not want to see me either?" Tchagin smiled and, sitting down close to Mimi, bent nearer to her.

"You I am very glad to see. Have you heard? Aunt has told you?"

Mimi bent her head, and the corners of her mouth quivered like a child's when it is ready to cry.

"Yes, I know."

Tchagin continued to gaze on Mimi, and it seemed he was thinking of something grave and important.

"How do you think—has papa gone for long?" asked Mimi softly.

"I am certain he will come back soon."

"Why did he go away? Alone so far away, amid the snows, in the empty house? . . . Unhappy . . . with his sad thoughts. . . . Poor papa! . . . I cannot, cannot bear it. . . ."

Mimi bent her head still lower, and, hiding her face in her hands, cried silently.

Marie looked at Tchagin in despair.

"You see," she whispered under her breath.

"Mimi, my little one, my dear little friend, I understand your grief, but try to trust to my experience of life; there are moments in a man's life when it is better for him to be alone. Papa will be calmer and come back."

Tchagin laid his hand gently on Mimi's shoulder, and his face, with its long thin nose, expressed the deepest sympathy with the grief of this delicate little slender girl.

"Why did he punish me? He did not even say good-bye. I would have known how to console him, I would have said something kind to him. . . . Aunt says I am not to write even. . . ."

"Wait a little. Perhaps he will write himself."

"Alexander Alexandrovitch! . . . Auntie! . . . How if we were to go to him? With aunt . . . with you, auntie! . . . Really, it would be very nice, very, very nice. We would be there all alone in the large empty house. Papa would feel so quiet and peaceful with us, and it would all pass. . . ."

Marie looked again at Tchagin with a meaning expression and bent her eyes on her work.

"Well, we'll see! Maybe it will be possible. But not at once. We must wait a bit," said Tchagin in a comforting tone, and Mimi looked at him with gratitude.

"You hear, auntie?"

"Certainly, my dear. We shall now follow our friend's advice: first wait a little, then hold another council and, if need be, we will go. Alexander Alexandrovitch has been close friends with your father all his life, and knows his character well."

The idea of the possibility of going to her grieving father seemed to hearten Mimi, and with a touching confidence she began to complain to the family friend the unhappy character of her mother.

"And afterwards mamma suffers and torments herself," said Mimi, looking at Tchagin with her large blue eyes. "She is quite ill now. She does not leave her bed, will not let anyone near her, and Nastenka told me to-day that she cries all the time. Why does she do so? Papa is so, so good. . . ."

". . . And how has he never noticed that this gentle child has no family resemblance whatever to him? . . ." thought Tchagin, listening to Mimi and examining her attentively at the same time. "Poor Misha! . . . Poor little gentle child! . . ."

IV

THE Christmas holidays had come. To an outsider the life in Gourakin's house went on just the same as formerly; Nathalie paid her daily visits and held receptions on appointed days. Michail hunted, and passed his evenings either at the English Club, or at the Bestoujeffs', or in restaurants. But the inner life of the luxurious private house was unbearably tedious since Michail came home after passing two weeks alone in the country. His hair had become still more grey on the temples; in his manner, in the turn of his head, something slightly haughty was to be seen, as if he tried to mask by means of a dignified demeanour the offensive self-love which was eternally gnawing his pride. A deep wrinkle had formed across his forehead. His look, which ladies had used to call "eagle's look," showed now the presence of a stubborn, distressing thought. With head slightly thrown back, and half-closed eyes, his glance used sometimes to glide on the faces of those who surrounded him, often without hearing the words addressed to him. With his wife he hardly ever spoke, noticing neither her presence nor her absence; he was coldly and negligently polite, moved to a bedroom of his own, and at the slightest hint of caprice or irritation on the part of Nathalie his face took such a harsh look that Nathalie, glancing at him, would at once become still and quiet. And Mimi? . . . Mimi used to look into her father's eyes with her own wide open sad ones and could not understand anything. He seemed to her more handsome than ever, more lovable with this hardly perceptible haughty manner, with this absent look as of hidden suffering. His caresses had become quite transient; he had ceased to come to her small white room, and very seldom

went anywhere with her. Mimi frequently caught him looking at her with a fixed gaze which she could not understand. By a delicate intuition of the soul she understood that between her beloved father and herself there stood some shadow, and that the joy of their close relations was darkened; she understood that this had happened since the day when he had gone off to the country for two weeks to bear his suffering alone, after which he had so changed not only towards her mother, but also towards her. With an inborn delicacy of feeling Mimi began to avoid her father, so as not to awaken in him the heavy thoughts which, she felt, were born in her presence.

One day Michail found on his writing-table a narrow rose-coloured envelope, sealed with a tiny seal. On the note-paper, smelling of violets, there was written in the distinct well-known handwriting of his daughter the following lines:

"My Dear, my Precious Papa,

"I feel that you have ceased to love me for some reason, that you are suffering. I love you and will love you till my death, my own dearest papa, and pray for you. You see, I do not dare to come to your study any more and console you, as it always used to be formerly. Dear papa, love me just a little bit. . . .

"Your very tenderly loving daughter,

"Mimi."

Gourakin, leaning on the table, his head on his hands, sat a long time in thought over this letter, which with its few lines showed him a sorrowing heart, already touched with the pains of life, and hurt by whom?—by him, her . . . father. Yes, for her he was her father, who, from the very first days since her birth, bred in her heart an answering deep affection by his own tender, passionate fatherly love. Under the warm rays of this love the child had grown up and learnt to return his love and caresses a hundredfold. He could not now, learning that the once beloved child was not his, love her with the same love; the source of that love had dried up. "Why? Has Mimi changed? Become

worse? No, she is the same. Then what is it?" Michail asked himself with sorrow, trying to find an answer in the hidden depths of his heart, unknown to him and dark. "For what reason? For what have I ceased to love this gentle and delicate child? Is it because her mother lied and I believed her? Have I then ceased to love her because she is the involuntary cause of my deeply offended self-love? Or is it then because when I look at her now I remember Volynsky? But then Volynsky never awakened in me angry feelings or antipathy. . . . Why, then, why? Lord, help me to find my way, help me to understand my feelings." . . . Michail suffered and could see no way out. Suddenly, like a sharp arrow, the thought pierced his brain: "You loved in her a particle of yourself." . . . From the moment that he learned that he was not her father, she had become a stranger to him.

"Yes, it is that!" said Michail, rising and passing his hand across his forehead.

The difficult dilemma was solved, and he felt a certain relief. Overcoming his unwillingness, he passed into Mimi's room. She was sitting with a book in her hand. On hearing the well-known footsteps Mimi jumped up trembling from her chair, then again sank down into it, and suddenly, with inexplicable fear and agitation, she closed her eyes tightly and put her hands to her ears. A large, heavy and caressing hand touched her head and slowly stroked her hair. Mimi cowered down, then quickly, without opening her eyes, caught the hand and, pressing it to her lips, began to cover it with kisses.

"Papa, dear, precious papa . . . I do so love you . . . I was so grieved when you went away, I simply cannot live without you," and out of the closed eyes fast and burning tears fell on Michail's hand.

"Do not cry, Mimisha, I also love you. Do not pay any attention. This will pass," said Michail, searching for the old simple words and the old tenderness in the intonations of his voice and not finding them.

"What will pass, papa? Why have you ceased to love me?"

"It will pass, it will all pass, darling. . . . Know only that I am passing through a difficult time. Do not think that I have ceased to love you. . . ."

"I feel it, papa dear."

"No, my child."

"Papa darling, I am grown up now, I can understand all; I implore you, tell me what has happened. You will see that I will understand rightly, and it will be easier for both of us"

Mimi, pressing her father's hand close to her breast, raised her head and was gazing into his eyes with an imploring, tear-dimmed gaze.

Michail shook his head slowly.

"No, darling, it is impossible."

Mimi bent her head meekly and sighed heavily.

Michail bent down, kissed her head, pressed the slim little fingers clasping his hand, and left the room. When his retiring footsteps were heard no more, Mimi, hiding her face in her hands, wept long and hopelessly. . . .

Tchagin came to dinner. After the last sad events his presence had become necessary for all the members of the family. He relieved the tension that was oppressing them. In his presence it was easier to speak of casual things to mask the thoughts that were torturing everyone. Tchagin with equal softness and sympathy listened to Nathalie's complaints and to Michail, and owing to his mediation the mutual relations between husband and wife, although strained, still admitted of life under one roof.

Mimi, with a face pale from weeping, sat opposite to Tchagin, and during the whole dinner did not speak a word. It seemed that she even did not hear what was being said around her. Busy with her own thoughts, she several times turned a sorrowful and intent look on her father, which he did not seem to notice; but Tchagin caught it. After dinner he as usual sat in Michail's study. Gourakin, who had seemed calm and talkative at dinner, suddenly changed. Tchagin understood that something new and sad had occurred. Several minutes both smoked in silence.

"You are not going anywhere to-night, are you?" Gourakin was the first to break the silence.

"No. If you do not send me away, I will spend the evening with you with the greatest pleasure."

"That is good. I am very, very downhearted."

Michail was silent, rose from his place, took an ash-box from the table, went over to where Tchagin was sitting, and sighed loudly and heavily.

"I did not think, Sasha, that it would be so difficult," he said, lowering his voice.

"What are you speaking about?" asked Tchagin.

"About Mimi. My wife has ceased to exist for me. I cannot pretend, I cannot be the same as I was, and—there, read that."

Michail took out of his pocket-book the rose-coloured sheet of note-paper and handed it to Tchagin.

"This is dreadful!" said Tchagin, after reading the letter and returning it with a sigh.

"Yes, it is dreadful. . . . It were better if I had not obeyed you and had not returned here. We would be living apart, and she would have suffered less."

"It would have been worse; she would not have consented to live with her mother. . . ."

Both were silent, with the same thoughts.

"Have you really ceased to love her, Misha? What for? Now, ask yourself—for what?"

"Because she is the daughter of a stranger. Because there is nothing of me in her. It is not my fault that I feel so, but it is so, undoubtedly."

"Well, now, Boris is your son; in him there is your physical self—and the result? Do you love him more than Mimi?"

"Boris? Boris is quite like his mother."

"That is very well, but he has in him what you feel the lack of in Mimi now, and which is why you have ceased to love her. And still you do not love him so much. Cannot you understand, Michail, that from her cradle you have given your heart to this little girl, that in her there is more of yourself than in Boris. I swear to you that I could not

cease to love any creature which from its cradle had been united with my heart by the power of love."

"I feel, Sasha, that you are right, that your words are true, but my brain revolts, my heart has grown cold, and I cannot bring back my departed love by the force of logic. I pity, I feel immeasurably for the little one, and at the same time her presence torments and oppresses me. I do not guarantee that I will be able to continue this life. . . ."

"Poor little Mimi!" said Tchagin in a low voice.

"You wanted me to return here—I have returned, and you see what has come of it. Now try to find an outlet."

Tchagin shrugged his shoulders in silence and spread out his hands slowly.

"What outlet?"

"Marry Mimi."

Tchagin started and, stopping with his cigar half-way to his mouth, fixed his eyes on Gourakin.

"What did you say?"

"I said, marry Mimi."

"Listen, Misha, you . . . you . . ."

"What about me? I have seen long ago that you are in love with her, that you worship her, that you are suppressing this feeling, that you try to hide it. I have noticed this long ago, and have often thought of it before now. Yes, I know that you are much older than she, that she could be your daughter, but in the end happiness in marriage does not depend on the age. One is young, and nothing comes of it, and one is old, and still nothing . . . one cannot make it out. At any rate, Mimi's character and her gentle loving nature are a serious guarantee for happiness."

"For mine, but not for hers."

"And for hers also. It is time for Mimi to marry; I repeat, marry her."

"I could expect all kinds of combinations regarding Mimi's future, but to hear from your lips what you have just said, Misha, I must admit I did not expect it."

"What are you so surprised about in the end?" interrupted Michail impatiently. "You know not less than I

that Mimi can only love a worthy man; neither beauty nor worldly position can tempt her. At present she wants more than ever a devoted man who understands her and a firm hand. Many a scatter-brained fellow is fluttering around her! She does not even notice them. She speaks of you as of a friend. She loves and respects you. Try to come nearer to her. You are clever and full of tact, and you will know how to do so that you will win her heart."

"I am overcome . . . I am staggered. . . . I did not expect this. . . ."

"Overcome? Why?"

Gourakin shrugged his shoulders.

"As if what I have told you has never entered your head before! As if you yourself had not thought of it a hundred times! I have only expressed your own thoughts aloud—nothing else."

"I will not deceive you; I have thought of it, but in the way that one thinks of impossible things."

"And it appears that it is not only not impossible, but even desirable. Please, Sasha, do not think that I am guided by the wish to get rid of Mimi. Not at all. If I were not willing to spare her heart, the simplest thing would be for me to go away myself. I want to find an issue for the complicated situation, an issue which would bring her healing and peace in future."

"I prize highly your trust in me, Misha, and am deeply touched that your choice has fallen on me, but . . . what will Mimi say?"

"I think that if you approach her skilfully, she will not say no."

"And your wife? And Maria Arkadievna?"

"Ah, my wife! . . ."

Gourakin shrugged his shoulders with vexation.

"Has she any feeling towards her daughter? Is not her future a matter of complete indifference to her? And Aunt Marie? . . . When the time comes, I will speak to her."

"Mimi . . . that child and all at once my wife! It *sounds* so strange. . . . I am absolutely unworthy to bring

into my world—that of a man near the end of life—this untouched, pure world of a young girl's spring," said Tchagin softly.

"Do not exaggerate, if you please. With all the supply of energy that was in me, I am more of an old man than you. You are in love with Mimi, and are agitated and dreaming, whereas I am so exhausted by all the blows that life deals me that I am ready to shut myself up in the country, as did my father, and break with everyone."

"That will pass. All will be forgotten, and you will love life again."

"Ah, the devil take it! Is this life? To live over forty years, and the result—sadness, discord and deceit."

A servant entered and announced that Marie was asking Tchagin to come to a cup of tea with her. Tchagin hesitated before replying. He knew that he would meet Mimi there, as she usually drank tea with her aunt in the evening. After the conversation with Michail he seemed to dread this meeting, but Gourakin persuaded him to go down.

"This is just the time for you to see her and speak to her to-day. She is sad; your sympathy and friendship will gladden her. Go, please, and I will go to the English Club."

Michail pressed Tchagin's hand.

"Good luck! To-morrow you dine with us, and afterwards to the opera. Nathalie is not going, and I am going with Mimi."

Tchagin went down. His heart beat strangely and unusually when on entering the dining-room he saw behind the samovar Mimi's sorrowful little face.

V

MARIE was entering the drawing-room of the Baroness Kern at the moment when the latter was speeding a parting visitor. With a face expressive of grieved astonishment, and her two small yellow fists pressed to her breast, the Baroness was listening to a society scandal which her friend, the wife of a high-placed General, was rapidly whispering into her ear.

"How dreadful! . . . dreadful! . . ." the Baroness kept repeating, drawing her sable cape closer around her.

The tall, stout General's wife was saying in so low a voice that only separate phrases could be heard:

". . . Burst into the bedroom . . . where she was half dead with fear . . . rushed at him with a *nagaïka.** . . . The other climbed out of the window in his underclothes . . . the policeman gave him his cloak . . . Governor of the province . . . the whole province is whispering . . . the Minister has made his report. . . ."

"Terrible scandal!"

The Baroness was peering at the approaching Marie without recognizing her. The General's wife broke off abruptly:

"*Au revoir, chère baronne.* I have remained too long. Take care of yourself, your cough is so bad . . . the weather is dreadful."

The visitor embraced the frail little figure of the Baroness, who had aged greatly within the last years. She seemed to be much smaller and dried up, but as formerly she went everywhere and received very much, and was always full of care for others. She went to meet Marie with outstretched hands:

* Whip used by the Cossacks, with a bullet at the end.—Translator.

"How nice that you have come! I have much to tell you."

Taking her arm, the Baroness led her through the drawing-room into the small room beyond.

Volynsky was there in an armchair, reading a letter. At their entrance he folded it carefully, putting it away in his pocket-book, and rose to greet Marie. The increased number of grey hairs and several wrinkles on the smooth, inscrutably correct face of the courtier did not diminish its attractiveness.

"Have you heard, Pavlik, what a scandal happened to Mme. Ratistcheva's nephew, the Governor?"

"No, I have not heard anything."

"Ah, something dreadful! . . . Some landowner, a deceived husband, horsewhipped him in the most scandalous circumstances. He jumped out of the window in his underclothes. A policeman gave him his cloak, and he arrived at the Governor's palace in such guise. It all happened in the early morning. Certainly, it was known in the whole province. Just fancy, what a shame!"

"Served him right," said Volynsky, smiling, and Marie seemed to see a hidden meaning in his subtle smile.

"How is Mimi?" asked the Baroness, serving Marie with a cup of tea, and moving towards her a massive silver dish with cakes.

"Thank you, she is better, but she is still at home, and will not go out anywhere."

"Is Maria Michailovna seriously ill?" asked Volynsky with solicitude.

"No and yes. The doctors say it is nerves. . . ."

Marie stifled a sigh.

"That is why she has not been seen at the last balls. I noticed her absence. Poor girl!"

"Yes, she has become very thin, poor little one!"

"A charming child," said the Baroness, not looking at anyone. After a few minutes Volynsky rose and began his adieux.

"Pavlik, in heaven's name, don't forget to support my protégé. If you do not help him, I shall have to take

him in and put him in my dining-room. His family is famishing. . . ."

"It will be done. Send him to my chancery."

"Thank you, Pavlik. Shall we see each other on Wednesday? Will you be there?"

"Yes, certainly."

Volynsky went. The Baroness came nearer to Marie.

"There is someone whom life has not touched," said she with a movement of her head in the direction where Volynsky had gone. "He does not grow old, is rich, distinguished, and is adored by such a charming woman as the Duchess. I assure you she is as much in love with him as in the first days of their liaison."

"Yes, life does not smile on all e[illegible]" said Marie with a sigh.

"Listen, dear Marie; how will it all end? I really begin to think that the best thing would be for Michail to leave the house; perhaps then he will be calmer. This question has become a positive *idée fixe* with him. If you had seen him here yesterday! What things he said! I simply could not believe my ears. . . . Now he accuses Pavlik of that lie. . . . Pavlik has behaved perfectly throughout; there is nothing to accuse him of. The Duchess? Well, I do not defend her, but Nathalie was a woman, and an experienced woman. . . . He even blamed me—why I had not opened his eyes at the time. Such nonsense! Even as it is I played too great a part in that foolish story. What right had I to enter into such intimate questions with him? I hinted the truth to Prince Alexei, I tried to persuade Nathalie, lastly, I spoke of it to your mother as a supposition. He would not listen to anybody or anything, and now he storms and raves. It is too late. The poor child is not responsible for having an unreasonable mother. . . . Why has he ceased to love her? . . ."

Baroness Kern was very agitated, and drew her sables closer round her with a trembling hand. Marie was silent, her eyes fixed absently on one spot. She sighed deeply *from time* to time.

"I assure you, dear Marie, the best thing would be if he left the house."

"And Mimi? How would it be with Mimi?"

"Mimi? . . ." The Baroness came still nearer. "I want to speak to you of her. You know me: I do not give advice without having considered the subject from all points of view. I have weighed all, and I find that in this case Michail is right: Mimi must marry. . . ."

"How—you also, *chère baronne?*"

Marie clasped her hands.

"Yes, I am of the same opinion."

"But he is too old for her."

"Find me a young man who's his equal. . . . There is none! Tchagin has all the elements for her happiness, except his age; the others have youth—and nothing else. Mimi will not be well unless she comes out of those surroundings. Tchagin will be able to give her, if not complete happiness, at least a complete illusion. Ah, my friend, where will you find complete happiness? It is not for you and me to speak of it."

"But is there then no other outlet than this marriage with the dear but elderly dreamer and mystic?"

"And noblest of men, you may add. You must admit yourself that a life in common between Nathalie, Michail and Mimi is become impossible. You are afraid yourself that Mimi will not survive the blow if her father leaves the house and shows his coolness to her by refusing to take her with him. . . . Then what remains? We must be reasonable. Misha told me that Mimi sits with Tchagin whole evenings."

"Mimi does not go anywhere, and never sees anyone. What is there surprising in that she stays with Tchagin, who comes every day?" said Marie vexedly. "Certainly it will be as God wishes—let His will be done—but I will not lend a hand to this marriage because I do not sympathize with it."

"Has Nathalie spoken to you of this?"

"I do not know what is going on with Nathalie; she keeps repeating that she will go mad if Misha does not

love her again, and at the same time she is again beginning to worry him about the expenses."

"There is nothing inconsequent in it: Nathalie is convinced that all Michail's expenses are caused by women. She thinks that by reducing his revenues she will make him give up such pleasures. It's absurd, but so it is."

"Ah, how sad it all is!" whispered Marie, sighing. "Mother was sure that such a marriage could not bring happiness, and she was right."

While Marie was sitting in the drawing-room of Baroness Kern, Boris Gourakin, with a look of irritation on his young and handsome face, was entering his mother's room. Nathalie was verifying some accounts at her pretty writing-table.

"We won't be interrupted?" asked the son, frowning.

"Probably not. What is the matter? Why are you so gloomy?"

"I have received a very unpleasant letter. Read it, please." Boris got the letter and handed it to his mother.

"Anonymous . . . that means something nasty."

"Not nasty, but a warning."

Nathalie read the letter, and instantly red spots began to appear on her thin face.

"About whom can it be? To whom could he give diamonds? Can it be Bestoujeva? . . . Or is there someone else? . . ."

Boris shrugged his shoulders.

"How do I know? How can anyone know for certain on what and how much my father spends? I resolved to show you this letter, because, I must admit, I am seriously troubled by his wastefulness. He has lived his life and lived it well; all my life lies yet before me."

"One should not trust anonymous letters, Boris; very often they are written not out of friendship, as it is said here, but from quite opposite feelings."

"However, you told me yourself that it was through an anonymous letter that you knew of the assembly in the restaurant."

"It was written that the supper was arranged in honour of Bestoujeva, but she was not there."

"That is not important; the fact itself was true."

"Yes, certainly."

"No later than the day before yesterday I was told that father had invited a company to supper at the Medvieds', and he squandered so much money that the servants were all crazy with joy. That is all very well, but to wake up a beggar one fine day is not at all to my taste."

"This is very sad and very serious. Give me the letter, Boris; I will think of it. . . ."

"I am afraid, mamma, that you are taking too much time in thinking over it, and the money is going and going."

"Ah, do not you begin to torture me now, do not add to my worries. I am so morally broken down, so sick in soul and heart, that I am surprised how I have the strength to live and think."

"I know that it is very sad for you, mamma, but you must understand that I cannot remain indifferent when I receive such warnings."

"Ah, dear me, dear me! There, again palpitation of the heart! . . . Give me my drops. There, in the bedroom, on the shelf."

Nathalie moved from the writing-table to the sofa and closed her eyes. After taking the drops she was silent for some time. Boris, clanking his spurs, walked up and down the room.

"Do not move, please, like a pendulum; *ça m'énerve,*" Nathalie said with a frown.

Boris put his hands in the pockets of his trousers and stopped before the window, looking out into the street.

"Order Moissei Borisovitch to be sent for; we must hold council with him. We will hear what he says," said Nathalie after a long silence.

Boris sent the servant for the steward, and, returning, sat down apart, softly clanking his spurs to a tune that was running in his head. Shortly afterwards a discreet cough was heard and Moissei Borisovitch entered. He was the

author of the anonymous letters informing Nathalie of her husband's life, and adding fuel to the fire which was ready to burst out in a great conflagration.

"How do you do, Moissei Borisovitch. Sit down, please. I must have a talk with you." Nathalie pointed to a chair near her. "What do you think of this letter?"

She handed him the anonymous letter. Moissei Borisovitch read it with the utmost attention, as if trying to understand the meaning of each word, then folded it up and handed it back. He was silent for a minute, as if considering something, and at the same time examining the design on the carpet.

"There is nothing new in this to you, Your Excellency? It is the continuation of the old story."

Moissei Borisovitch shrugged his shoulders with submission.

"Can you guess whom they mean here?"

"I have heard something. . . . I do not know how much truth there is in it."

"Bestoujeva?" asked Nathalie with a quivering voice.

"I heard so."

"And really for an amount of five thousand roubles?"

"That is difficult to verify."

"But if so, that is dreadful. Something must be done to protect the fortune from such mad expenses."

Nathalie, trying to overcome her agitation, pressed her fingers to her temples.

Moissei Borisovitch was silent.

"What are we to do? This cannot go on so. . . . I shall simply go mad with all these worries."

"Listen, mamma," was heard from the other side of the room.

The steward turned an attentive gaze on Boris.

"*Vous cherchez midi à quatorze heures.* Why think of finding ways and means when a question of such importance has to be decided? Would it not be the most simple way to appoint a certain sum for my father, beyond which he could not go?"

"But he has all the powers," retorted the steward, urging

Boris on to speak out the thought that he had been step by step suggesting to the son against the father.

"Deprive him of these powers," interrupted Boris hotly. "Deprive him of them legally. There are only too many reasons therefor."

A general silence ensued.

"Cannot any other way be thought of?" asked Nathalie in a low voice, clasping her fingers and pressing them until they ached.

"The powers were conferred legally, and can only be cancelled legally," answered Moissei Borisovitch calmly.

"But what does that mean? How is it done?" asked Nathalie with a frown as of physical pain.

The steward began to explain circumstantially and without hurry all the laws relating to the case in question.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the house, in Michail's study, crouching in the corner of the huge sofa, Mimi sat in a motionless attitude awaiting the arrival of her father, starting at the least sound. Her eyes, thoughtful and sad, were fixed on one spot. Shivering with a nervous chill, she wrapped her large warm Orenburg shawl round her slim shoulders and ensconced herself deeper between the two silken cushions lying in the corner of the sofa. At last the well-known heavy steps of her father were distinctly heard. Mimi jumped up from her seat and, folding her hands on her bosom, stood awaiting his entry. Michail Gourakin saw her at once, and unaccustomed to see her in his apartments now, stopped in the doorway in astonishment.

"That you, Mimi? I did not know you at once. . . ."

"It is I, father. . . . Listen, papa dear, I must tell you something of importance. . . . I have been waiting for you here on purpose."

"What is the matter, my dear? Perhaps you might put it off till the evening? I will be freer."

"No, papa. I must speak to you at once."

"All right, I am listening."

Michail seemed to be in a good humour.

"Papa, it is very difficult for me to speak, but I feel that

it is necessary. This morning I went to Boris's room, but he was not there. I sat down to his table to wait for him, and my eyes fell on a letter lying there, without signature, beginning with the words 'your father.' Without stopping to think if it was right or wrong I read it. . . ."

Mimi lowered her eyes, and after a second's pause reported to her father the contents of the anonymous letter.

"I left the room without seeing Boris, and thinking what I ought to do. I went to the library—the doors were open. Soon I heard how Boris went in to mamma and they spoke about this letter. Now Moissei Borisovitch is there. You know very well, papa, that he is capable of every evil in respect to you."

"Thank you, girlie—thank you, my darling. You did very well to tell me of this."

Michail stood several minutes thinking over what he had heard.

"Yes, you did very well to warn me."

Having made up his mind, Michail stepped towards the door.

"Papa, wait a bit! Don't go when you are in a passion. . . . Again there will be——"

Mimi stammered.

"There will be nothing, I promise you," Gourakin smiled; "you may be quite assured."

With these words he left the room rapidly and went to his wife's apartments, where he had not been since his return from his estate. His unexpected appearance at the moment when Moissei Borisovitch was circumstantially explaining the points of the law in regard to depriving a person of the rights of possession seemed to put everyone out of countenance. Boris involuntarily rose on seeing his father, Moissei Borisovitch's glance ran from Nathalie to Gourakin and back again. Nathalie made a movement as if she wanted to rise.

"I did not know you were at home, Michail," said she.

This sentence had no logical sense, as they all felt, as the absence or presence of Michail in the house had had no relation whatever to his wife's life for some time. Goura-

kin seemed not to have heard her words, and did not even look towards her.

"Moissei Borisovitch," he said to the steward, scarcely answering the latter's bow, "I have sent for you, but they told me you were here. I do not want to disturb your business conference, and will say what I want in two words: please to procure me out of *my capital*"—Gourakin emphasized the words—"five thousand roubles by to-morrow morning. I have to pay to-morrow an outlay that I have incurred. Please to do it without delay. Nothing more. Au revoir."

Gourakin turned and left the room.

VI

RETURNING home after his conversation with Michail, Tchagin was in a deeply concentrated tense frame of mind. Many years had passed since he had learnt to subjugate his will, to keep control over himself, not to feel anger, or fear, or be agitated. Little by little his spiritual atmosphere acquired the extreme equanimity to which the ancient wise men of the East and India aspired. The gods of Olympus, whom he had piously worshipped all his life, had passed away into forgetfulness, like the dear shadows of persons dead long ago. At the time when, many years before, he had given himself up to the worship of the Roman gods with a special refinement of taste, he once had a terribly realistic dream of Serguei Radonejsky, who seemed to him to enter his study, with its multitude of antique statues. Turning his austere face to Tchagin, the saintly old man had said in a distinct, penetrating tone of voice:

"Leave these dead deities; read the Tchetyi-Minei,* and you will discover light."

At that moment Tchagin woke up. He felt a strange restlessness, and it continued until he undertook the reading of the book which had been recommended him. On learning that Serguei Radonejsky is considered the patron of mystics, he threw himself into the study of occult sciences, became acquainted with the lodges of the Martinists of the East, England, France and Germany, carried on a correspondence with Majata-Khan, the Rosenkreutzers, Grand Orient and Steiner. He very soon acquired, and was deeply impressed by, the mysterious doctrines, and from a disciple became a master of secret brotherhoods. Very few knew of this side of his life, and even those only partly guessed

* Martyrology.—Translator.

it, as Tchagin himself never touched upon these matters and avoided giving direct answers to questions. By nature well-wishing and kind, he now became still more penetrated with the idea of good and love of humanity.

During the last year Tchagin had passed through a great struggle. Love had suddenly entered his heart. He worked persistently over his will, compelling himself to submit this love for the daughter of his friend to the spiritual elements, not those of the flesh, and at the very moment when it had seemed to him that the spirit had begun to conquer the flesh, Gourakin had awakened the bygone dreams by proposing marriage with his daughter. Without for an instant losing his usual equanimity, Tchagin, on remaining alone, sighed with a great relief. After passing a round room hung with dark crimson hangings, where the marble images of the now forgotten ancient deities dwelt in immutable peace, Tchagin, with a candle in his hand, not seeing them, entered the study, threw off the "earthly clothing," and, taking up garments of white linen and violet silk, put them on and passed into an adjoining room, which was always closed. He was surrounded by a mysterious and fragrant semi-obscurity. Metallic lamps, with stilly burning little starry fires, were placed in the four corners of the room before the images of the Christian faith, consecrated by sacred rites, and of the Buddhist and Jewish religions; in the fourth corner a lamp was burning before an amulet. On the walls hung pentacles and aggrippes, representing the figures of the hermetic philosophy. On a small table, covered with a piece of dark velvet, lay the crystals, *i.e.*, balls of rock crystal destined for exercises of second-sight. Near them stood a perfuming-pan of ancient design. Tchagin threw in a few grains of Siamese frankincense, and a jet of bluish smoke began to fill the room with light perfumed waves. On another table lay a sword, the leaden rings, the sacred salt, and some water in a crystal phial. In the middle of the room stood an altar; on it lay the Books with the magic formulas and ancient clavicles of the twelfth century; around the altar a small circle was drawn with red chalk.

Folding his hands on his breast cross-wise, and half closing his eyes, Tchagin stopped before the altar without passing over the circle. Little by little, by the effort and tension of his will, he was conscious of a perception of the two elements in him—the physical and the spiritual element. Dividing these two elements more and more, and concentrating his consciousness on the spiritual substance, he entered it completely and felt the imponderability and freedom of his conscious "I." With a last effort of his will and spirit he began to blend with the astral-mental planes. Tall and immobile, in his wide garments, with a pale, singularly transfigured face, slightly dimmed, wide open eyes, in the mysterious semi-obscurity and stillness, Tchagin seemed to be a light vision which might disappear every minute in the waves of blue incense. His substance, which had become divided and was concentrated now in the spiritual element, began to soar upwards slowly, slowly. He now saw himself distinctly, standing motionless in the middle of the room with his arms folded cross-wise, his imponderable substance soaring higher and higher in a mysterious and blessed ecstasy. The finest air-thread of light joined his physical substance with his astral spirit. Strange harmonious voices, or chords, like a distant echo, were borne towards him, after he had passed beyond the dark region of visions and the indistinct, awesome creations of evil thought. Transparent shadows planed afar, waves of air floated in imperceptible luminous shades, the infinite space was awesome and beautiful. Notwithstanding the distant harmony of the sounds or voices, there reigned a deep, unmoving, mysteriously grand stillness. . . . All became clear; the past, present and future were blended in one circle. Earthly conceptions disappeared, thought was still . . . all was blended in contemplation, in the conception of the incomprehensible. . . . How long this state continued Tchagin did not know. When he sighed, he was conscious of standing in the mysterious room before the altar. He sighed again and felt that the struggle was over, that he had conquered the flesh, and that from now he was giving his love to Mimi to serve for her happiness, to

protect her from sorrow, to support her strength in the battle of life. He foresaw that he would not be her husband, although all the paths tended that way.

From this evening Tchagin, with a calm assurance, tried to become nearer and nearer to Mimi. She not only did not avoid him, but even seemed to seek his company, and willingly passed all the evenings with him. Marie watched her niece in silence, and, leaving the future to Providence, she used to go to the Kazan Cathedral and pray zealously before the wonder-working ikon. She remarked that lately Mimi had become much calmer; the bursts of anguish which sometimes touched upon despair had ceased; she complained less often of her father's coolness; she seemed to have grown stronger, to be thinking of serious and peaceful things. Marie guessed that it was Tchagin's influence, his long talks with her, his power to bring peace to her troubled soul.

One day, after Tchagin had left, Mimi came up to her aunt and without a word took her favourite place at her feet on a footstool. Marie watched Mimi attentively without stopping her work. Mimi's face was very serious; she was thinking of something very deeply.

"You are again sad, Mimisha?" asked Marie in a low voice, stroking her hair.

"No, auntie, I am quite calm. Auntie dear," she continued after a long silence, "Tchagin has proposed to me."

Marie caught her breath. She laid down her work on her knees and closed her eyes for a minute. She had been waiting for this phrase a long time, and still on hearing it she felt as if someone had given her a blow on the breast.

"Tchagin has proposed to you? . . . And what did you say, Mimisha?"

"I will give him his answer to-morrow. Let papa decide. . . . As he says, so let it be."

"My darling, besides your father's decision you must ask yourself and act in accordance with the decrees of your heart. It is not a walk that you are asked to take with Tchagin; it is for all your life, for ever. You must decide such an important step independently, and not under the

pressure of advice even from your father. I know that papa can only wish for your happiness, but besides the considerations of wisdom, and more important, are the dictates of your heart."

"Tchagin, auntie, is a very, very good man, and if papa wants me to marry him, I will do so willingly; if papa does not want it, then I will try to refuse him in such a way that it will not hurt him."

"Pray to God to-day, my darling, as fervently as you can, and do as God will direct you."

Marie sighed, and two large tears welled up slowly and fell on her work.

Mimi did not say anything more, and Marie did not ask her. Leaning her head against her aunt's knees, she sat a long while in a motionless attitude. Marie pretended to work, but her fingers trembled and she dropped her stitches one after another.

The next morning Marie went to the Kazan Cathedral and stayed while the mass was being served. When she came back she felt so restless she could not bring herself to do anything; her anxiety increased with each hour. Several times she had to take her drops, tried to read the papers, took up a time-worn volume of "Imitation de Jésus Christ," with leaves quite yellow and old. At last she heard light footsteps, the rustle of silk, and Mimi entered with a serene face and a slight smile on her lips; Tchagin came in behind her. Marie's heart sank.

"Aunt dear, wish me happiness; I am engaged," said Mimi simply, coming up to Marie.

One second there was silence. Marie wanted to say something, smiled pitifully, and suddenly, hiding her face in her hands, burst into tears. Tchagin and Mimi rushed towards her, but she soon controlled herself, and silently embracing Mimi, folded her to her bosom.

"Alexander Alexandrovitch, I implore you, take care of this child," she said in a broken voice, extending her hand to Tchagin.

"Maria Arkadievna, I swear to you, from this day the object of my life will be to be a friend, a protector, to Mimi.

Believe me, for Mimi's happiness I am ready to give up my life."

In Tchagin's voice there was so much sincerity and depth of feeling that Marie gratefully embraced him and kissed his forehead.

"Does mamma know?" she asked her niece.

"Papa has gone to tell her. We will go to her directly."

Tchagin passed the whole day at the Gourakins' house, and each word of his addressed to Mimi breathed such a depth of sincere, honest love that Marie, without noticing it, became quite reassured, and even found it in her heart to be grateful to Tchagin for the serene tranquillity which he had been able to instil into Mimi.

During the dinner, at which three visitors were present, champagne was served, and Michail proclaimed the engagement and wished the engaged pair happiness. Marie, who knew her nephew from his childhood, saw that under his outward gaiety there lurked a nervous excitement. Nathalie was quite at ease, and seemed pleased with her daughter's choice.

When Tchagin left all felt themselves to be tired with the excitement of the day, and retired early. Marie, in a dark flannel dressing-gown, her spare hair fastened in a knot on the top of her head, was just putting out her lamps, which she always did herself, when she heard the door open, a few heavy footsteps, and Michail entered.

"May I?" he asked, standing in the doorway.

"Certainly you may. Sit down, my boy, let us have a talk," said Marie kindly.

She was struck by her nephew's dejected look. Not a shadow remained of the bold gaiety with which he had all day masked his inward agitation. He sank heavily into a chair and, leaning his elbows on the table, stared at the candle. Marie sat down in her favourite seat near the table.

"There, I have come to have a talk with you, to lighten my heart, and now I do not know what to say. . . . I am sad, aunt, very sad. . . ."

"I am quite calm now, Mishenka."

"My soul is grieving. . . . Ah, this restless, grief-stricken soul! . . ."

Michail took his head in his hands. In his exclamation there was such a deep misery, such a fund of torture, that Marie's heart beat anxiously.

"Misha, Mishenka! . . . Christ help you! . . ."

"That dear child, Volynsky's daughter, this torture of mine which she unconsciously excites by her tender love for me! I cannot bear it, aunt. . . . I find no rest, nor peace. . . . And now this marriage into which I am pushing her. . . . Lord! . . . Where could I go to hide from myself? . . ."

Gourakin clasped his head with both his hands and, bending it low over the table, moved it from side to side as if in physical pain.

"Do not torment yourself so, Mishenka. . . . Tchagin is a good man, and Mimi cannot be unhappy with him. . . ."

Marie tried to soothe her nephew as well as she could. She knew that his nature, always impulsive, always responsive to every call on it, felt both joy and sorrow to their utmost extent. The heights of ecstasy, of buoyant gaiety, and bursts of generosity were divided but by the thinnest line from gloomy outbursts of wrath, unrestrained irascibility, agonies of despair and grief. And this living, impulsive soul of his Marie loved with an unfailing, deep love. He sat for a long time, leaning his head on his hands, listening to his aunt's exhortations, and suddenly sobbed, in a stifled voice of deep suffering:

"Why, why did that woman spoil all my life, all that was most precious in it? . . ."

The aspect of a big strong man in tears was so dreadful that Marie burst into tears herself. With trembling hands she poured some drops into a glass and, trying to lift his head, calling him by the most caressing names, she endeavoured to make him drink them, as she would persuade a little child.

The whole house had been fast asleep for some time when Gourakin, broken down morally, left his aunt.

VII

NATHALIE, with an irritated, splenetic look on her face, not in correspondence with her magnificent Parisian gown, all worked in silver and clothing her well-preserved figure like a glove, with three rows of large pearls on her neck, and carefully holding up her train with a hand encased in a long white glove, passed through a row of brightly lighted rooms into the large white ball-room, where the old grey valet had just closed the windows and was perfuming the air with aromatic essences by means of a spray. Nathalie shrugged her shoulders under her ermine cape.

"How you have cooled the rooms! The guests will be frozen," she grumbled, and passed on into an adjoining saloon smaller than the ball-room, where a buffet was laid.

The footmen were arranging the vases with flowers, giving the finishing touches to the horse-shoe table, on which there was a profusion of sweetmeats, fruits, and cooling drinks. Champagne cup was prepared in large silver jugs.

Amid skilfully dispersed tropical plants small coloured lamps were burning on little tables. An enormous bear of ice, with electric, brightly-burning eyes, stood in a niche of green. Nathalie gave a look to all this with the eye of an experienced mistress of the house, and passed into the banqueting-hall, where the servants, with a clatter of silver and china, were laying a number of tables for four persons each for the supper.

"Timofei," said Nathalie to the butler, "have you given orders that over and above the one hundred and fifty sets there would be added twenty-five more?"

"Just so, Your Excellency. Which table will you desire to occupy?"

"Any one—it does not matter."

Nathalie frowned, pressing two fingers to her left temple, which was aching with a nervous pain. The ball appointed for that evening had come at a very inopportune moment for Nathalie. From the morning she had been feeling irritated. Firstly, the forthcoming ball, as it appeared, had promised to cost much more than was originally supposed, owing to the innumerable inventions of her husband, and secondly, she had accidentally heard that Bestoujeva had promised to be there, notwithstanding the evident tactlessness of the action; Nathalie never disguised her antipathy to her husband's friend, and she had felt sure that Bestoujeva would not come. A bitter angry jealousy was boiling in her, especially as Bestoujeva always carried with her such a fund of fresh, sincere gaiety and wit wherever she appeared that like to a spoilt child society forgave her her lightness of conduct; she was invited everywhere, and somehow it always came about that she occupied the first place. Nathalie guessed that she was coming owing to Michail's entreaties, who, she had heard, was becoming more and more infatuated with her.

The ball was being given in honour of the betrothal of Mimi and Tchagin; those who desired it might wear costumes. The costume of a *boyarishnia*,* designed for Mimi by a friend of her father's, a celebrated Russian artist, was fabulously expensive. Nathalie could not restrain herself, and made a scene with her husband when the costume had been brought a few hours before. A whole batch of bills in her hand, she had gone to Michail's study and, laying before him the bills which had revolted her by their enormity, she began to reproach him sharply for his fancy in having the costume executed in accordance with the designs of the celebrity. Michail, without looking, pushed away the bills.

"We shall speak of that later on," he interrupted coldly the angry stream of words.

But Nathalie, irritated by the forthcoming arrival of

* A daughter of a "*boyarin*," a Russian gentleman of rank in olden times.—Translator.

Bestoujeva, who, as she foresaw, would be the belle of her ball, could not restrain herself, and, with angry determination and eyes darkened with fury and slightly distorted mouth, continued to sting.

Michail tore himself away from the letter that he was writing, laid aside his pen, leaned back in his chair, and looked at his wife. He instantly felt a desire to close his eyes and stop his ears, so disgusting, so physically disgusting, did she seem to him, with her mouth distorted by fury, her lips which had lost their freshness, and the vulgar intonations of her heightened voice.

"Leave me . . . enough. . . . I have already heard this," said he, looking away.

Nathalie would not stop, although she was conscious that each new word of hers might bring on her the horror which she had once passed through.

"Begone!" thundered a voice suddenly above her ear.

Nathalie glanced at her husband. He was standing upright near the table, with bloodshot eyes. She caught his glance as it fell on the wall where the horsewhip hung. Something cold and sharp seemed to seize Nathalie's throat and breast. She started and, hiding her face in her hands, and drawing in her neck, ran out of the room. This cold and sharp lump had been choking her all day, and by the evening had changed into a nervous pain in the left temple.

Michail, rapidly throwing off the wave of approaching rage, soon resumed his former peaceful state of mind, slightly excited by the preparations for the ball, which he always very willingly took upon himself.

By the evening his spirits rose still higher at the thought of the meeting with the fascinating, gay Bestoujeva, who knew how to infuse a certain novelty and coquetry in her relations with men.

At ten o'clock Mimi looked at herself in the glass for the last time and smiled involuntarily at the exquisite reflection of the *boyarishnia*, who seemed to have descended from the canvas of the celebrated artist, the friend of her father. The tall *kokoshnik* (head-dress) all covered with pearls sat lightly and easily on the hair, which was hanging down in

a long plait, crowning the head so gracefully poised on the supple girlish neck. The morocco slippers with their high heels encased tightly the narrow little foot, and pattered gaily with each step. The brocaded *sarafan* (the Russian national dress), embroidered in front with precious stones, rustled softly without disguising the grace of the slender figure. The *shougaï* trimmed with sable, thrown lightly on the shoulders, made a dark and pretty background for the delicate skin of the face and neck. Mimi, her new heels sounding their tap, tap, on the polished parquet, passed through the brilliantly lighted rooms and knocked at her father's door. In his evening dress, fresh-looking, vigorous, with sparkling light in his eyes, and the special "ball-room" face, that Mimi always noticed in her father on such occasions, Gourakin opened the door of the study and came out into the ball-room.

"The beautiful *boyarishnia!* Very, very good!" said Gourakin with undisguised admiration, looking at the fragile figure of Mimi from his great height. "Your mother is grumbling at the cost of the costume, but to-night our bride-elect will eclipse everyone. Has your betrothed seen you?"

"Not yet. He is taking tea with aunt. I am going there directly."

"Go, go. . . . But do not be late for the arrival of the guests."

Gourakin put his arm round her shoulders gaily and lovingly. Mimi felt suddenly light and happy at heart, She saw that her father was in one of his best days, when from each word, gesture and look of his there emanated a sense of unrestrained, exhilarating enjoyment of life. With a light gliding step Mimi ran across the ball-room and went on to the stairs leading downstairs to her aunt's apartments.

"Timofei," she heard Gourakin's sonorous voice, "if the musicians are come, tell them it is time to take their places in the gallery."

Soon the elegantly dressed pairs began to arrive. The ladies were in ball dresses, with their shoulders bare, or in

fantastic costumes. Nathalie, having driven away her irritation and splenetic depression by an effort of her will and exchanged it for an artificially friendly smile, was standing at the entrance to the ball-room with Prince Bibiche, the smart General in the suite of the Tsar, who had become somewhat stout of late, and, constantly breaking off her conversation with him, was receiving the artificially warm congratulations on her daughter's betrothal, exchanging kisses with ladies, giving kindly nods to the curtesying young girls, touching with her lips the foreheads of the older men, and with a coquettish grace acquired during her whole life extending the tips of her fingers to be kissed by the young ones.

Mimi, standing near by with Tchagin, received the felicitations with a smile that seemed to have caught something of her father's good spirits.

Surrounded by several ladies, in a corner of the room, stood a stately gentleman with a splendid head encircled with a wave of grey curly hair. This was the celebrated artist who had given his talent to the reproduction on canvas of the bright living type of the Russian woman. In his grey eyes shone the unquenchable power which distinguishes a talented man from a crowd of his fellow-creatures.

The guests continued to arrive. From the gallery above the ball-room the bright strains of a valse were heard. Under the bows of the violins the light tones grew and melted away softly and smoothly. Light girlish feet in satin slippers and filmy stockings tripped merrily on the parquet. Those who were not dancing sat near the walls. Boris, the very image of his father at his age, in his new uniform of the Horse Guards, buttoning his glove on the way, rushed across the ball-room, to be in time to meet at the very door and carry off in a valse pretty little Mika Bestoujeva, very like her mother. At the moment when Nathalie was extending her hand in ceremonious greeting to the mother, Gourakin approached them, and with an undisguised pleasure in his sparkling eyes kissed the latter's hand, and directly, fearing some sally on the part

of his wife, carried off Bestoujeva, a tall, stately blonde with large round greenish eyes, to the opposite end of the room, where a small group of ladies and men were engaged in animated conversation.

"The Duchess," whispered someone.

Gourakin, breaking off his conversation with Bestoujeva, holding his head high, manœuvred his way among the dancers and bowed respectfully before the entering pair. The Duke, smiling and peering about, exchanging hand-shakes right and left, was seeking the bride-elect with his eyes.

"Oh, what a glorious sun! . . . Beautiful bride-elect! . . . May I crave your hand for a kiss, *boyarishnia?*" the Duke said jestingly, admiring Mimi, whose delicate beauty showed well in the new, unexpected framing.

Mimi danced all the time without a rest, and she felt very happy under the admiring glances of the guests. She felt that her father was also in good spirits. From time to time he threw her approving glances, and it seemed to her that she was once more as near as formerly to the heart of this big man with the eagle look, whom everyone loved and who was her father.

The ball went off very well; it was the most brilliant one of the season, and was much talked of in the highest circles.

VIII

SINCE Mimi's betrothal it seemed as if in Gourakin's house everyone breathed more easily. The wedding was fixed for the second week after Easter. Nathalie began to busy herself with the trousseau with great interest, and in the endless discussion of fashions, laces and stuffs she seemed to take a greater part in her daughter's life. Mimi had such serene eyes, such a peaceful, calm frame of mind, that all who surrounded her came under her influence and were assured that she was happy. In society the news of Mimi's and Tchagin's betrothal caused a great astonishment; no one had expected it, and those whose duty it was to collect and spread sensational society news were indignant that this news had come straight from the Gourakins and not through themselves. Mimi went out again, and her pretty head on the long delicate neck with the turned-up golden hair was again seen at balls. Dancing or chatting with the young men, many of whom envied her betrothed, her eyes always sought out his tall thin figure, and in meeting his glance she used to nod and smile to him. On returning from balls she every time, no matter how late, went in to her aunt, and, bringing into her bedroom the atmosphere of the ball-room, sat down on the edge of her bed and related to her all her experiences. Marie listened with pleasure, glad to see her former animation returning to her.

After the wedding the newly-married pair were to go abroad till autumn, and Mimi, already sharing her betrothed's love for Italy, was dreaming of this voyage, the more so as she had received from him as a present for her birthday a villa on the Mediterranean Coast, which had become the object of endless talks between them. Tchagin drew detailed plans of the villa and garden, and it seemed to Mimi that she had already been there and seen the

gravelled paths, the tall palms, and oleanders in flower, the tremendous prickly cactus, like gigantic spiders, the marble terrace leading to the sea and flooded with the golden blinding sunshine.

"Villa Maria," reflected in the blue warm waters, beckoned to her, and it seemed to Mimi that there, far away, lulled by the blue waters and the love of her future husband, she would regain her tranquillity and be quite happy.

It was the middle of Lent. Mimi, with Tchagin, went to a charity bazaar, where at all the stalls she had friends and was prepared to put her mite into all their cash-boxes. The enormous room, flooded with light, swarmed like an ant-hill with an elegant, ever-moving crowd. The sounds of an orchestra drowned the din of voices, laughter and exclamations. In the movement to and fro friends were found and lost sight of again. Near the stalls of pretty women the crowd was denser; laughter, witticisms and *bons mots* were heard. Mimi stopped to speak with some of her friends, and did not notice how she became drawn on by the movement of the crowd and lost sight of her betrothed. She stopped near a column.

"Have you seen Mimi Gourakina?" she heard distinctly asked near her.

She turned round and saw two ladies, who were standing so that they did not notice her.

"No, I have not seen her. Where is she? Is she with her betrothed?"

"She passed here not long ago with him. She is very nice. I cannot understand what made her choose Tchagin! A delightful man, but he might be her father. Many youths aspired to her hand—there was no lack of suitors."

"I heard that she would not have anyone, and that it was the parents who arranged this marriage."

"Her mother perhaps; Gourakin always loved her too much."

"They say that lately there are such discords in the family that it was necessary to marry the daughter as soon as possible."

"But still, you know, I am surprised at the father; he ought to have found her someone younger."

"What would you, my dear? Gourakin cannot have real paternal feelings for her."

"Why not?"

The lady looked excited and pricked up her ears, foreseeing something new and interesting to hear.

"How—do you not know?"

"But no, nothing at all. . . . Ah, how interesting! . . . Do tell me, dear friend; you know how all this interests me."

"Have you not heard the history of his marriage? It's quite a romance. Mimi is not his daughter, but the daughter of Volynsky. You know Volynsky? No? He is the Duchess's lover."

"You don't say so! I hear it for the first time."

"And they say that Gourakin has only known quite lately. What a drama! . . . If you examine her, there is in her much of the true father—the figure and the expression of the face. . . . I pity poor Michail Gourakin—so handsome, such a talented, interesting man, and his family life, they say, is very miserable. . . . Ah, look to the left! . . . There is Garina. A real Ninon de Lenclos—does not grow old at all, and always has a crowd of men behind her."

"But you must be blind, my dear! She is painted—that is why she looks as if she did not grow old. . . . And who is it beside her, do you know? With the feathers in her hat? . . . Handsome. . . ."

"Certainly I know: that is Bestoujeva, the *chère amie* of Michail Gourakin. I have been told that her skin is of a blinding whiteness, and that she shows herself to her admirers lying *au naturel* on the skin of a black bear."

"How shameless! Now I ask you, in what do women of the world differ from the *cocottes*, after that?"

Mimi did not hear any more; Tchagin, pushing his way through the crowd, came up to her and offered her his arm. She, seeing nothing and hearing nothing, leant on his arm, but could not walk.

"Mimi, what is the matter? You are so pale! Are you ill?"

"Yes, I am feeling unwell. . . . I do not know what it is. . . . Let us leave. . . ."

Tchagin supported the agitated Mimi and led her step by step towards the door, put her in the carriage and took her home. She was silent all the way and, leaning back in the corner of the carriage, sat without moving her closed eyes. She mounted to her room in the same silence, asking Tchagin not to tell anyone of her sudden illness. Her teeth were chattering under the influence of a nervous chill. Tchagin covered her up like a child in a rug, made her lie down, and sat down beside her. Mimi lay now with tense, frightened eyes, staring fixedly and strangely before her. Tchagin called her name, she did not hear him. Very much frightened he bent over her, and softly touched her forehead; she started, sighed heavily, and closed her eyes.

"Mimi, my angel, what is it? Does something hurt you? You are frightening me."

"No, nothing hurts," she answered in a low voice.

"Then what are you thinking of, my dearest?"

"I will tell you afterwards. I cannot speak now," said Mimi, lower still.

An hour passed—another; she continued to lie in the dreadfully motionless attitude with frightened, wide-opened eyes. It began to grow dark. The servant entered to light the lamp. Mimi came to herself and grew agitated.

"For God's sake, dear friend," she said to Tchagin, "let no one, no one, come in to me, otherwise I shall be ill, I shall go mad. . . . Lock the door . . . I beg you . . . I cannot see anyone. . . ."

Tchagin tried to soothe her, but her excitement increased. He locked the door, made her lie down, took her hand in his, and, softly stroking it, urged her to sleep and not to think of anything. Little by little she became calmer and slept. Then he went down to Marie and told her all that had happened.

By the evening Mimi was raving in a high fever. The doctor could not say what it was; the next day would show.

In the night the fever rose: Mimi moaned, tossed about, spoke in disjointed sentences, kept calling her father, cried; and only by the morning she fell asleep from exhaustion and loss of strength. Mimi's illness proved to be inflammation of the brain. The doctor asserted that the cause of the illness was an unexpected nervous shock. . . . It was a riddle to everyone; only Tchagin came nearer to the truth than the others in deciding that something had happened to Mimi at the charity bazaar when they had become separated by the crowd.

Nathalie, Marie, Michail and Tchagin one after another took turns in nursing her.

Her life was in danger, and the fear of losing her united them all in one link of grief. It seemed that Gourakin suffered more than the others. Mimi constantly called for him in her delirium, and Michail, without knowing why, blamed himself for her illness. There were minutes when the former feeling of tender love filled his heart and he kissed the hands of the sick child and called her by name softly, but Mimi, in high fever, with the burning flush on her thinned cheeks, did not understand his words, and continued to moan pitifully and complain of something to someone.

About a month passed in this way. She began to recover very slowly. Her constitution was reviving slowly; the patient seemed indifferent to life, often cried in secret, and broke the hearts of those who loved her. She had become so thin, and so transparent and light, that Marie could easily carry her from her bed to the armchair. Silent and apathetic, she lay or reclined in the chair, indifferent to all that was going on around her. She often asked to be left alone, and only liked to talk to her betrothed. Both Marie and Michail felt that she even showed a certain coolness towards them. They frequently remarked an expression of hidden suffering in her eyes as they rested on them. Marie had become quite grey during that month, Michail had a deep wrinkle across his forehead, which made his face look much sterner and graver.

At last the long expected day arrived when the doctor

allowed the patient to be taken out for a drive. It was early spring, and its approach was felt in the air, in the colours of nature. Mimi, leaning on her betrothed's arm, descended the stairs, staggering from weakness. Taking her seat in the carriage, she asked Tchagin with a pale smile to drive to the Islands. In the bright rays of the sunshine Mimi looked still thinner. Watching out of the window how she was being placed in the carriage and her feet were wrapped up in a rug, Marie saw the dreadful change in her with a feeling of deep sorrow; she seemed not to have seen it so distinctly as at this moment.

"Poor little girl!" sighed Miss Jones, who stood beside Marie, as if answering Marie's thought.

There was no one on the Islands. In the air there was the smell of the moist earth, already warmed by the sun's rays. In some places could be seen layers of flattened, blackened snow. The trees were bare, but through their black branches glimpses of the blue sky were seen, from where the warm, revivifying rays of the sun fell on the earth. Mimi gave a deep breath and pressed her betrothed's hand.

"How glorious!" she whispered. "Under this spring sky and the warm rays I feel that my soul is thawing. I have been unkind. . . . You have all suffered so much through me, and I was so unkind to you all."

"What are you saying, my angel?" protested Tchagin hastily; "you were indifferent to all, because you were ill—that is so natural. . . ."

"No, it was not only that," answered Mimi thoughtfully.

Tchagin, fearing all excitement for her, hastened to change the subject. From that day Mimi began to grow stronger, and her young constitution seemed to revive together with nature's revival and to yearn towards life. Mimi was again loving and tender towards her aunt and her father, trustful and gentle with her betrothed, but all felt an imperceptible change in her, a sort of reserve, of something unspoken. With the recovery of his daughter's health Gourakin again became colder to her, but it seemed that Mimi had become reconciled to her father's coolness,

and she never now raised the painful question in her talks with her betrothed, never sought for consolation, in his comforting, all-reconciling arguments. She was silent. Only a little light of gladness shone in her eyes when Michail used to come to her room and was specially fond in his manner to her.

The wedding had been put off till summer. Nathalie was again busy with the trousseau and was ransacking with pleasure her numerous stores, seeking for the best pieces of old lace for the trimming of her daughter's dresses.

"Do not hurry, mamma, there is plenty of time," Mimi used to say, casting an indifferent glance on the valuable bits of old family lace which her mother used to bring her to excite her wonder and gratitude.

"How so, plenty of time? There only remain six weeks to the wedding—it is not much. You have grown stronger now, and one of these days we shall go with you to Madame Josephine to try on your dresses."

Mimi was silent, and, lowering her eyes, seemed to be thinking her thoughts.

IX

SINCE Mimi had quite recovered she took a daily walk after luncheon on the quay. She had solicited and obtained permission to go out alone without Miss Jones.

Fastening the chain to the collar of her big high-bred dog, Mimi, in a dark blue tailor suit, which had just been sent her, with a scarcely perceptible flush on her thin little face, left the house and as usual started for her walk along the quay. Whether it was that the dog pulled at his chain or that she was disturbed by some thought, Mimi's hand trembled visibly, and she looked attentively to either side as if seeking or fearing to meet any of her acquaintances. After going a pretty long way she once glanced along the nearly empty quay and, convinced that no one was looking at her, crossed the road rapidly and turned the massive handle of a private house. The porter stood aside to let her pass and looked at the unknown visitor with a certain curiosity.

"Is Pavel Konstantinovitch in?" asked Mimi in a low voice.

"His High Excellency will not receive anyone to-day before three o'clock."

Mimi was confused for a second, but she very soon regained her composure and said:

"Tell him that the daughter of Nathalia Georgievna wishes to see him on urgent business."

A minute later, the servant who had taken the message returned and with a respectful bow told Mimi that His High Excellency asked her to come in.

Mimi, pale through excessive agitation, entered the hall, and had hardly passed the door leading into the large light waiting-room when Volynsky appeared at the opposite door and came up to her.

"Mademoiselle Mimi, I am happy to see you, and above all to see you looking so much better."

With these words Volynsky extended his hand and slightly bent his proud grey head.

Lifting her blue eyes to him with an expression of questioning thought, Mimi looked at him attentively and kept silence for a few seconds.

"I must speak to you, Pavel Konstantinovitch . . . but no one must hear us."

"Oh, something mysterious," Volynsky said jestingly with a smile, and pointed to the door from which he had just entered.

"I bless the mysterious cause which has made you pass the threshold of this room. Such gentle and pure young girls as you bring good fortune," Volynsky continued, leading Mimi into a spacious room furnished with the refined taste of a sybarite.

Near the enormous bow-window looking out on the Neva, where steamers and barges sailed by, and the Peter-and-Paul fortress showed in the far distance with its gilded upward-tending steeple, stood a large writing-table. Among the numerous things adorning it Mimi caught sight of a picture of the Duchess in a golden frame, which seemed to confirm what she had heard about Volynsky. Volynsky showed her to an armchair and took his seat opposite her. His face, usually so cold and haughty, was friendly and kind.

"With what pride I would openly call myself the father of this charming young girl," thought he, gazing at Mimi.

"Pavel Konstantinovitch, I came to tell you that I . . . that I . . . know all," said Mimi in a broken trembling whisper, and bending her head, deathly pale, pressed her hands to her heart.

"All? . . . What—all? . . . I do not understand. . . ."

"I know that you are my father. . . ."

"Who told you that? Who could tell you? What are you saying, dear child?"

Volynsky, in extreme astonishment, bent forward and took her hand.

"Is it not true? Do I not resemble you? Is it not for that reason that he has ceased to love me since he has known it? . . ."

Mimi was looking at Volynsky with stern, questioning eyes. He felt that it was impossible to deceive her any longer.

"Mimi, who told you that?"

"I do not know who it was. . . . I overheard two ladies talking who did not know that I was near. Since then I have understood many things. I am your daughter . . . you knew it . . . and still you were always so far from me."

Volynsky shook his head sadly and sighed heavily.

"You have never loved me?" asked Mimi in a scarce audible tone.

"I have loved you, and love you now, my dear child."

"Then why was I surrounded with deceit? Why did you allow it?"

"Mimi, I had to act so, notwithstanding that it would have been a great happiness for me to call you my daughter. As you said just now, Michail Vladimirovitch only knew the truth but lately."

"Mamma told him?" said Mimi half interrogatively, half affirmatively.

Volynsky was silent.

"You—my father! . . . How strange! . . . I heard of it just before my illness . . . my thoughts are in a whirl when I think of it . . . and I am thinking of it all the time and cannot get used to it."

Volynsky rose, took a few steps, poured out a glass of water and drank it. This was the only sign of his agitation.

"What will happen now?" asked Mimi in a low voice.

"All will happen as you would wish."

"I will not marry Tchagin . . . it is not necessary now. I like him very much, but not as a future husband."

"Why, then, my child, did you promise him?"

"For papa . . . that is, for him. . . . I saw that my love and my presence were a torture to him, were oppressing him, and I decided to deliver him of them. Now I know all and will not remain in that house any more, because I con-

sider that I have the right to do as I wish. My God, my God! . . . Why did I learn all this?"

Mimi hid her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"Poor dear child! . . . Dearest child, do not cry . . . don't cry, my Mimi, whom I dared not even caress. . . . Stop, little one; enough, my little daughter."

Volynsky put his arm round her shoulders and kissed her hair, stroked her head, and, it seemed, could not find words to console her.

Mimi pressed her head to his breast and continued to cry softly.

"My whole heart seems broken . . . I cannot change it. All my life I worshipped him, I was so proud of him . . . and even now I love him so! . . ."

"My child, can anyone prevent you from continuing to love him, as a man who took the place of a father to you? Can anyone force you to forget him? Your heart is free, and I have less right to it than anybody."

"Yes, but you are . . . you are my father, and nevertheless, however I struggle with myself, I cannot cease to love him."

Mimi's voice was scarcely audible, and her tear-stained face, with her hat slightly deranged and her hair crumpled on her forehead, expressed a deep, unchildlike grief.

"My poor child, the suffering which has fallen on you is greater than you can understand and overcome. You are too young yet. Do not torment yourself or force your heart. Michail Vladimirovitch has deserved your love—love him. If I deserve it maybe you will love me also. . . . You have given me great pleasure by telling me that you are not going to marry Tchagin. Alexander Alexandrovitch is a kind and good man, but he is much older than you. . . ."

"Ah, he is very, very good . . . he is a wonderful man, and I know that he will understand me."

"I am sure of it."

"May I ask you one more thing?"

"Anything you wish."

"Mamma . . . you do not love mamma?"

"No, I do not love her."

Volynsky's face took a cold expression.

Mimi wanted to ask something more, but she changed her mind. Rearranging her hat, she rose to go.

"How will it be now? Teach me . . . my former father has ceased to love me; with mamma I do not want to remain. . . . I would like to live with you . . . I would get used to you and learn to love you . . . papa."

Mimi lifted her eyes to Volynsky's face with a timid and supplicating expression.

"Dearest child, with time—yes, but at once it is impossible. Why give society food for scandalous gossip? Speak first with Tchagin, and I will hold council with your dear Aunt Marie."

"But she is not my aunt any more. . . ."

Mimi's eyes filled with tears again.

"That does not change her feelings towards you. I know that her whole heart is bound up in you."

"May I tell her that I came here?"

"Certainly, and ask her from me to be to-morrow at my friend's, the Baroness Kern. We will talk the whole matter over, and you will know all from her. And for the time being, my darling, I ask you to control your grief. You are my daughter, and you must learn how to control yourself, as I do."

The same evening Mimi told Tchagin of the drama of her heart, and timidly pressing his hand between her cold little fingers, she begged him to give her back her word and to remain her true and faithful friend.

"You are free, quite free, my dear Mimi. My feelings to you are unchanged. I am neither hurt nor surprised; I foresaw this. But why did you hide your grief from me? I would have helped you to bear it."

Tchagin gazed on Mimi with kind faithful eyes.

Mimi talked long on that evening with her former betrothed, and when they both appeared at evening tea, no change was to be seen in their relations to one another, and no one could suppose that they were no longer engaged. It was decided between them that Tchagin would

speak to Michail and tell him all that he had heard from Mimi.

"Only tell him—be sure to tell him—that I love him as formerly, and will love him so always, all my life long," Mimi urged Tchagin, with burning eyes, when he said good-bye to her to go to Gourakin's rooms.

Tchagin found Gourakin sitting in his study on the sofa with his legs stretched out and smoking a cigar.

Lately, even when quite alone with himself, Michail had ceased to suffer. Something had become hard, cold, in him, and he was quite pleased with this new state of his heart, which allowed him to live the fictitious, insincere life so foreign to his real nature.

On that day Gourakin was in good spirits. In the morning he had received a letter from his steward, who informed him that the rents on his property had been increased, that part of the forests had been sold advantageously, and that the money was being sent him. In the day-time he had called on his uncle, the Prince Alexei, who was suffering from paralysis in both legs. On hearing that after Mimi's wedding Michail intended to live separately from his wife, the Prince proposed to him to occupy the apartments of the Princess, which had now remained empty for many years. Michail was very pleased with this proposal, as his uncle offered him such a luxurious home without charge. Encircled in the rings of smoke from his cigar, which was lightly and pleasantly lulling his brain, Michail was in that happy frame of mind which is experienced by the favourites of fate after a successful day.

Tchagin, not guessing this, was searching in his mind how to begin the difficult subject, which he was afraid would call forth one of those outbursts of unrestrained wrath which he could not bear.

"Were you with Mimi all this time?" asked Gourakin without changing his easy attitude.

"Yes, I come from her . . . and I want to speak to you about her very seriously."

"A-ah! Something new?" asked Michail indifferently, trying to calculate how much money would remain to him

from the sum sent by his steward after the payment of all his debts.

"Mimi knows much more than we thought. . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"She knows—that is, she has learnt—the real state of affairs."

Gourakin, without changing his attitude, let out a cloud of smoke and only turned his eyes for a second towards Tchagin.

"To-day she saw Volynsky and told him that she knows that he is her father, and not you."

"A resolute act . . . I did not expect such independence from her. Well, and what then?"

"She has firmly decided to leave this house."

"Why should she do it? Her wedding is not far off."

"Mimi gave me back my word: there will be no wedding."

"Then where is she going?"

"At present she will go with Maria Arkadievna abroad, and after . . . after, I do not know, but she will not remain here in any case."

"As I shall not remain here either, I think that she is acting rightly. But why has she broken with you?"

"Nothing is broken. We are the best of friends."

"*Tant mieux!*" said Michail peacefully.

He was so tired of all family dramas that however they ended he did not care; he only wanted them to be over and to be free.

Although Tchagin knew his friend very well and his sudden changes of temper, still he did not expect to meet with such a serene calm in such serious and unexpected circumstances.

"What's the matter with you to-day?"

"With me? Nothing. I am feeling very well. I called on Prince Alexei. He is offering me all the apartments of his wife; I shall remove thither as soon as Mimi departs. The old man is getting quite bad—it is sad to see him. And what a fine fellow he was in his time! . . ."

Gourakin stretched out his hand lazily for some matches to rekindle his cigar, which had gone out.

Tchagin, feeling sad after his conversation with Mimi, listened absently to what Gourakin was saying, easily passing from subject to subject. On leaving Michail he went downstairs, and suddenly heard light quick footsteps behind him.

"Well, how is papa? . . . how is he?" Mimi asked on overtaking him, with impatience and agitation awaiting his reply.

"It will be all right. . . . Probably he will speak with you to-morrow. Do not agitate yourself, my angel; you must be very careful of yourself still."

"Did you tell him what I asked you to?"

"Tell him that yourself. When I spoke to him, I felt that it would be better that you tell him that yourself."

Tchagin could not tell Mimi that Michail was in such a serenely calm state of mind that the yearning of her sorrowing heart would not be understood by him.

With Nathalie it was Marie's fate to explain matters. Contrary to Michail, the explanation was a very difficult one. On hearing that Mimi had refused Tchagin and decided to go abroad with her aunt first, and afterwards to leave the house to live with her, Nathalie became quite indignant, and even accused Marie of supporting her daughter in her rebellion.

"If Mimi does not live with me, then I warn you seriously, Nathalie, she will live with her father—that is, with Volynsky. She told me so."

Nathalie looked at Marie with astonishment.

"Has Mimi spoken with Volynsky?"

"Yes, she spoke to him before speaking with us."

Nathalie was dumbfounded. She never thought that the girl would show such courage and determination in her actions. It seemed to Nathalie as if heavy weights were falling down on her from all sides, pressing on her heart and brains. She did not foresee that a last and most heavy stroke was awaiting her: a final rupture with her husband, for whom she, suspecting nothing, was preparing, together

with her son and Moissei Borisovitch, a reduction of the sums paid to him for his personal needs. She was convinced that by limiting his budget she would make him give up the women who always stood between them.

While all these explanations and nervous attacks of his wife were going on in the house, Marie and Mimi were packing and making their preparations for their journey abroad, and Moissei Borisovitch was holding malignant and venomous conferences with his wife and son. Michail was putting his personal affairs in order, building plans for the immediate future, calling on Prince Alexei, giving orders for the arrangement of his future home, and looking forward with joy and relief to the happy day when he would again be a free and light-hearted man in the house which he had known from childhood.

PART FOUR

I

WITH a tired and displeased expression on her face Nathalie was wandering about the spacious rooms of her house, giving orders that it should be put in order for the winter season. She had returned home on the previous day from Moscow, where she had stopped on her way from her estate at the convent of the Princess Anna Valerianovna, or Mother Alexandra, as she was named since she had been invested with the *schema*. Her footsteps resounded with a loud and dull sound in the large rooms without their carpets, with the furniture, vases and ornaments all swaddled up in their covers, and the huge undraped windows, through which the yellow-grey, damp autumn day was peeping in. Nathalie always felt particularly lonely during these first days on her return to the capital for the winter, when the disarranged rooms seemed to increase her low spirits. Growing ever more sparing and even stingy as the years went by, she would not allow her house to be put in order in her absence, being convinced that the upholsterers, floor-polishers, and other workmen would send in dishonest bills. Boris was now occupying the rooms downstairs where Marie had lived. He led a very dissipated life, and Nathalie saw him very little, not even every day. Whether the grey, sad-coloured weather were the cause or not, on this morning Nathalie felt her loneliness more keenly than ever. During the last years time had laid with a cruel hand signs of approaching old age on her outward appearance. Although her figure was still slender, the face had grown yellow, small wrinkles had

planted themselves around the eyes, the corners of the mouth had become drawn down, and betrayed the distinctive qualities of her character—narrow-minded irritability and spitefulness. Not only the passing years were oppressing her, but the feeling of a certain void, which had suddenly disclosed itself at the end of her life, and in which she felt the cold of a lonely, unnecessary existence. She had always loved the world, and was sure that she was also loved by those ladies who in beautiful dresses had come to her dinners, suppers and balls, and all those high-placed statesmen and the flattering youths who pressed respectful kisses on her negligently extended, beringed hands. Her house could not contain all those who desired to be received by her, and she used to invite to her sumptuous dinners and balls certain groups of her friends at a time, was very capricious in her selections, sorted her company, was not very prompt in returning calls, and still all used to come with pleasure and have a good time, and she was quite sure that she had a right to consider herself a brilliant centre round which the men's heads, of all ranks and ages, bowed in respect and admiration, and ladies smiled pleasantly, extending their hands *avec une amitié bien sincère*, and with so much affection for "*cette adorable et élégante* Nathalie Gourakin." . . . And suddenly all had changed. Since Michail had removed to Prince Alexei's house, her own house had seemed to lose its attractive power, as if its light had gone out, or its gaiety had flown away. . . .

When the first outbursts of despair were past, and Nathalie recognized that her husband would not return to her under any conditions whatever, she, although with a deep rent in her heart, had begun to grow used to her new position of abandoned wife. Every day life went on as usual, and she had to adapt herself to it. When, a year after the family catastrophe, Nathalie had resumed her former *train de vie*, and called on all her acquaintances, everyone found that she was very much faded and had lost her sparkle. When she entered drawing-rooms with the step of a woman tired out and disenchanted with life—*démarche trainant le fardeau de la vie*, as someone had

expressed it—on her lips a sour-looking grimace instead of a smile, giving vent to cutting remarks on the behaviour of her husband, all those who saw her expressed their sympathy with her grief by a look, a prolonged pressure of her hand, or a stifled sigh full of meaning. She believed all these signs of sympathy, and considered herself surrounded by true and devoted friends, but behind her back these same people used to speak of her as dull and wearying, and generally concluded all conversations about her with a remark of the following nature:

"What would you? With her impossible disposition she has only brought it on herself. . . ."

Little by little her drawing-rooms began to grow empty, the dinners and evening parties became dull, and at last Nathalie understood that the gaiety which had always reigned at her parties came from her husband, that it was he who, with his inexhaustible enjoyment of life, attracted people, that in the sounds of his sonorous voice trembled living, cheering notes, his jolly laugh infected people with his gaiety, his inborn friendliness and simplicity in his relations with everyone represented a feeling of unconscious but large-hearted natural liberalism. The women loved him because he loved them all together and each one separately, the men loved him because he was a good, obliging comrade, an honourable and cultured man, richly endowed by nature, and chiefly he was loved by everyone because he brought with him a sincere, irresistible gaiety, founded on simple, kind-hearted relations towards people and life itself.

Nathalie, who had been preparing a blow for her husband by reducing his revenues on a legal ground, was dumbfounded and humiliated by his voluntary withdrawal, not only from the management of her fortune, but even from her fortune itself. After his departure many of his liabilities remained in the hands of Moissei Borisovitch; Nathalie caught at them as at an anchor of safety, and notwithstanding the objections and protests of the steward, ordered him to pay immediately on all the bills the enormous sum of several hundred thousand roubles. She was sure that such

an act of generosity and magnanimity would be rewarded and would lead to a reconciliation, but Gourakin, who had always felt a certain contempt and unconcern in questions of money, did not seem to take her generosity in the spirit that she had hoped he would. He called his son to him and through him transmitted his thanks to his wife. By the payment of the enormous sum of debts Nathalie had helped Michail to wake up one fine morning in his luxurious apartments in Prince Alexei's house and breathe a long breath of relief; he stretched himself, smoked a cigarette, and, prolonging the pleasure of lying in bed a little longer, felt himself to be a happy man, free from all anxieties, unpleasantness, and financial complications. Despite the grey hairs which were silvering his temples he felt the vigour of his body and the same inexhaustible love of life, as in his younger years.

Nathalie did not avoid meeting her husband, but each casual meeting disturbed her for several days; in her suffering she recognized that in losing him she had lost all that was most precious for her, that meant life to her. However she might persuade others and herself that Michail had been a bad husband and had left her because he had no moral principles, somewhere deep in her soul she blamed herself for not having known how to preserve the love of the man whom she still continued to love.

Boris, her quondam ally in her battle against her husband, in whom she had hoped to see a support for her old age, had not justified her hopes. Since she had given him part of her fortune, he had taken to keeping late hours, to squandering money, and plunging into the pleasures of life to such a degree that he very seldom saw his mother, and grew quite cold towards her.

Notwithstanding the week passed in the convent with the Princess Anna Valerianovna and the long comforting talks with her, Nathalie, on returning to her empty house, again gave way to dejection. What had seemed to be full of expiatory meaning in the convent oppressed her here as a burden above her strength. Princess Anna Valerianovna exercised a certain influence over Nathalie; she understood

her troubles, as she herself had passed through them; she found the right kind of comforting words with which in times gone by she had disciplined her own heart when it had felt indignant against her own husband. She desired to lead Nathalie along the same path which she had selected at the end of her life, but her efforts were defeated by the narrow-minded, shallow nature of Nathalie, who was not capable even of temporary submission. Nevertheless, her visits to the convent had a beneficial effect on Nathalie, and with no one was she so frank as with Princess Anna Valerianovna. Only on one point they differed: the Princess did not approve of, and even warned Nathalie against, her infatuation in regard to Father Lukà Nepoutiovy, who had risen like a turbid scum on to the higher circles of society.

The Princess had quitted the worldly life, and by prayer and fasting humbled her pride, and she was very severe against Father Lukà's actions, which did not correspond to his preachings, nor to the notion of piety. But she might grow as agitated and as angry as she could trying to prove that Father Lukà was no more than a skilful and cunning rogue, Nathalie defended him warmly, assuring her that Father Lukà was a humble religious fanatic, who had retained his pure primitive nature of a man of God amid all the honours and favours of the higher society, which would inevitably have tempted and spoilt any other man.

The Princess, listening to Nathalie's earnest defence of her favourite, fidgeted in her armchair with her old plump body, ran her fingers rapidly through her beads, fixed an angry sharp glance on Nathalie, and seemed to be munching something with her old toothless mouth.

"Your dear Father Lukà is a scurvy sheep, which has infected the whole flock," the Princess interrupted Nathalie's long speech.

Notwithstanding her life in the monastery, the Princess had not lost the habit of persons of her society of mixing the French and Russian languages together.

"You are all blinded, and do not want to see on what

unclean, low instincts all this false religious fanaticism is based. He is a dirty—*passez-moi le mot*—lustful peasant, who used to run after maidens in his village, and here the ladies themselves have shown him that in playing the religious maniac and humbly calling on God's name, he can penetrate into their chambers, and the mutual love of lust will be invested with a sort of mystery."

"In heaven's name, Princess, what are you saying? I know him, he comes to my house; we talk together by the hour. . . ."

"With you he goes no farther than talk, because you are not young, but try to leave him alone with Mimi."

"And there would be nothing either."

"Ah, don't!" The Princess made an angry movement with her hand. "Do you think I do not hear of the scandalous histories which are connected with his name? I do not want to sin and mention names . . . but you know them as well as I do. Why must he be closeted for his pious teachings in the bedrooms of Princess Maievsky and numerous other young ladies and girls? Why does he not shut himself up with you, instead of proclaiming all his nonsense publicly?"

"Allow me, Princess, one must be just. . . ."

"No, no, *chère amie*, better not tell me anything more. You have chosen a false and dangerous path. . . . That scamp and cunning fellow is a seducer, and you are profaning our Church in allowing that lustful peasant to interpret the teachings of our Saviour. Please, Nathalie, do not speak of him any more; each time I lose my patience, and it leads to nothing."

"Very well, Princess, I will not speak of him," answered Nathalie coldly; "but to judge so severely of a man one must know him personally."

"Too much honour, too much honour!" retorted the Princess angrily.

After such discussions she used to rise with an effort from her chair and, moving heavily on her swollen feet, pass into her bedroom. There, kneeling down on the high step of the huge ikon-case with the holy ikons, she would

repeat her prayers, her lips moving inaudibly, while she counted her beads until she regained calmness of spirit.

During the last visit of Nathalie's the Princess was specially indignant and agitated, as she had heard rumours that Nathalie's name had been scandalously connected with that of Father Lukà, but Nathalie remained indifferent to the exhortations of the Princess.

"Humility consists in disdaining the evil which is spoken against us," said Nathalie calmly after hearing the Princess out.

"Where there is disdain, there is no humility, firstly," said the Princess meaningly, "and secondly, if honest people call *votre Père Lukà* a debauchee, then there is something behind it."

"Most of all I trust my own experience."

"And there you are wrong, as your own life shows," remarked the Princess severely.

Wearying and disturbing thoughts did not leave Nathalie all the time that she was giving orders and receiving reports. The approaching winter frightened her with its loneliness and dulness, which she was not able to cast off. Yesterday Mimi had met her at the station and promised to call on her to-day; then she had accepted her promise indifferently, now she kept glancing at her watch with impatience, fearing that Mimi might not come. On finishing with her orders, Nathalie passed into her large and richly furnished bedroom, which was the only room that it was permitted to put in order in her absence. Sinking into a chair before the toilet-table and mechanically running her hand over her hair and skilfully arranged chignon, she leaned her elbows on the table and with her face between the palms of her hands she gave herself up to her thoughts and sat staring with unseeing eyes at her reflection in the glass. She asked herself with anguish, how was it that all her life seemed over? Why was she so lonely? Why were people like the sea, at the time of the tide running in like the waves, hurrying and overlapping one another to express their admiration and adulation, and then suddenly, like the sea at ebb-tide, retreating hastily and of a common

accord, from the hospitable shores, leaving them covered with drift and weeds. . . . Loving her husband with a jealous and tormenting love, Nathalie at the same time needed to be in communion with her fellow creatures, and the ever-changing, gay, pleasure-seeking crowd which filled her house was necessary to her as an indispensable element of her life.

For this crowd she had had beautiful dresses brought over from Paris; for this crowd she had carefully tended her outward appearance, she had had masseuses for her face and body; for the crowd she had smiled when she felt inclined to cry; she had lied, endeavouring to mask her strained relations with her husband, after their quarrels; she had spent thousands for balls and dinners. . . . For some hidden, unknown reasons the ebb-tide had come; the crowd, like the sea-waves, had rolled away, leaving after it slime and drift in the form of evil-speaking, mockery, malevolence, or contemptuous pity. Was not her husband also torn away from his family? But why was he not lonely? Why was he now—she knew it for certain—as ever, surrounded by a great number of friends, or seekers of his favours? Why did not he suffer from dulness? Why did the passing years, although touching his hair with their wings and throwing in some silver threads among his locks, as well as imperceptible wrinkles on his face, not extinguish the fire in his eyes, not take away the jolly careless laughter of youth from his lips, not disfigure the handsome contours of his profile, but just leave him, in spite of all natural laws, the same fascinating, pleasure-loving favourite of fortune? . . . And she? . . . Nathalie started and, looking straight before her, saw a faded, pulled-down face, with dimmed eyes and deep, sharply outlined wrinkles from her nose to the corners of her mouth, with a sour, unfriendly expression. Yes, she was a complete old woman, unneeded by anyone. . . . Her life was over, and nevertheless, the body was alive; memory, as if in a glass, was turning over page after page of her life, her soul was aching with anguish. Nothing to catch hold of, nothing to rest her thoughts on. . . . She was a stranger to every-

one, and did not need anyone; no one was dear to her, to no one could she tell her grief and sob out her tears. She had loved the crowd, because the crowd had admired her, curried her favour, but she had not loved mankind; she had not loved anyone but her husband. . . . And now there was no one near her; neither her husband, nor the crowd of acquaintances, who had occupied her imagination, imposed certain obligations, distracted her thoughts, created an outer life of varied impressions. If her husband had died, it would have been easier for her to bear her retirement from the world, her complete bankruptcy; she would not be tormented and teased by the consciousness that it was she alone who was plunging into the cold and darkness of a gloomy, lonely old age. . . .

Nathalie pressed her temples with a low moan, closed her eyes with an expression of suffering, and bent her head.

Neither Princess Anna Valerianovna nor Father Lukà had been able to draw aside a corner of the curtain which divided her fruitless splenetic sufferings from the simple and sad truth: she had passed all her life loving only herself alone; she had neither loved her fellow-creatures nor her husband; in him she had only loved her own passion for him, low-minded and deeply egotistical. Michail's soul, his personality as a human being, were foreign and uninteresting to her; she had loved passionately and tormentingly his masculine power over her, and now that she had lost it she was completely bankrupt.

A hysterical lump was mounting to her throat, and Nathalie felt that in a moment the tears would flow from her eyes. She moved away rapidly from the toilet-table and with a decisive movement pressed the button of a telephone apparatus which was placed near by on a small stand.

"Stepanida Karpovna? . . . Yes, my dear, it is I, arrived but yesterday, and, as you see, ringing you up already. . . . I am feeling so dejected! . . . Tell Father Lukà that if he does not come I shall be ill. . . . Ah, no, I do not want anything or anyone—I want a talk with him. . . . He comforts me. . . . Ask him, my dear; I will wait."

Nathalie passed her hand over her face with a suffering mien and waited impatiently for an answer. After a minute she got the one she desired.

"Oh, how glad I am! . . . Thank him . . . I will send the motor-car for him at four o'clock. . . . So, now I am feeling easier at heart. . . . *Au revoir*, dear. . . ."

Nathalie had just hung up the receiver when rapid footsteps were heard, the heavy silken drapery was lifted, and Mimi stood in the doorway.

"May I, mamma?"

"Very glad to see you. How are you, Mimi? I have been expecting you all the morning. It is so dull in this large unarranged house. Take off your hat and sit down."

Now Nathalie was less pleased to see her daughter than she would have been half an hour earlier. She did not like anyone to be present at her talks with Father Lukà, the more so as, although Mimi had never expressed before her mother her full contempt for him, Nathalie had guessed it, and Mimi never met him in her mother's house.

These last years Mimi had greatly changed; she had grown older, her features had become more determined, the girlish uncertainty in her movements had disappeared, the shoulders were broader, her bust was fuller, and from a pretty maiden she had grown to be a beautiful, delicate woman. Mimi had been married and lost her husband. She had wedded a young diplomat with a very good career before him. They had loved each other and lived together but two years; he had fallen ill suddenly and died from an unsuccessful operation. Mimi had grieved deeply, but after a year she took off her mourning and became reconciled to her fate, and again her peaceful calm demeanour, which had such a beneficial effect on all those who surrounded her, came back to her. After the death of her husband she had gone to live with her father, Pavel Konstantinovitch Volynsky, and she filled his large, always empty house with the fragrance of a woman's presence, impregnating everything, and laying on everything its special seal. The large white *salon* with the gilded chairs seemed quite as empty, but a forgotten gauze scarf on a

chair or table, or some music open on the piano, and near by a tiny, lace-trimmed batiste handkerchief, seemed to give life to the whole place and whispered to the imagination of each one entering the room that behind any door there might be heard the light footsteps of a woman, and the empty *salon* might be brightened with the radiance and smile of a woman's eyes and lips.

Volynsky worshipped his daughter, and gave up to her so much of his time and heart that the Duchess was secretly jealous.

Mimi took off her small felt hat with the white feather before a glass, and the golden curls, feeling themselves free, fell with a capricious movement on the forehead of her fresh, delicately-tinted face. A black silk skirt enveloped the narrow hips, a similar blouse adorned with its graceful folds the slender, supple body. Mimi had grown much more like Volynsky: the same features, the same reserved grace of movement; only in the expression of the blue eyes there was more softness and warm-heartedness.

"Well, relate to me, how have you passed the summer? You are looking exceedingly well, and I am very glad that you have left off wearing full mourning: it gave you *une figure tragique*. So you are pleased with your trip abroad?" asked Nathalie, examining her daughter attentively.

"Very pleased indeed. The waters have done Aunt Marie much good, and then we, as I wrote to you, went to Switzerland. Our hotel was full of nice foreigners, and Aunt Marie was even jealous of their company."

Mimi smiled, and looked wonderfully like her father.

"Was Pavel Konstantinovitch there?"

"Papa came for a short time."

"Have you seen Michail lately?" asked Nathalie, trying to appear indifferent.

For an instant Mimi's face and neck were suffused with a red flush. She felt unaccountably uncomfortable; it hurt her that her mother could ask about a man who had left her, repulsed the love of her daughter, and was still unalterably loved by both of them.

"I saw him a few days ago at Aunt Marie's."

"How is he—well and happy, as usual?"

"Yes, he is just the same."

Nathalie shrugged her shoulders.

"A wonderful nature! What an inexhaustible capacity for life, what irrepressible *joie de vivre!* . . . A sort of exulting god, carried along in a chariot amid life's festivities . . . he is borne by white horses, around him are flowers, eternal sunshine, women bacchantes, jollity and gladness. . . . It is not life, not our life, with the grey week-days and anguished thoughts. . . ."

Nathalie became suddenly excited, and two crimson spots burned on her cheeks.

Mimi looked at her mother with astonishment.

"Do you know, mamma," she said slowly and thoughtfully, "what you have said just now is wonderfully true! . . . I have often thought of him, but I have never been able to find such wonderfully true and just expressions . . . a god exulting amid life's festivities. . . . Wonderfully true. . . ."

"You evidently approve of this, while I blame it. . . . He does not care for anyone; all his life he has concentrated on himself."

"You are not right"—Mimi shook her head slowly—"he loves mankind very much, and——"

"No, please do not speak to me of this love. All my life I have been paying too dear for this love of mankind. . . . He deprived his nearest and most loving ones in order to carry his heart full of love to the market of humanity. . . . It is dreadful, it is cruel! There is nothing to admire or be touched about. How many tens of thousands has he thrown away to all kinds of singers and artists, who have nothing to do with him now! . . . He paid for schools and asylums, climbed up into garrets of beggar artists and would-be poets, and what have they given him? He does not know himself where they are, nor what they are . . . he has even forgotten them. . . ."

"Ah, mamma," interrupted Mimi hotly, "but that is the real love of mankind; glad to give, not waiting to be loved in return."

"And those who love him, who are ready to bear any sacrifice for his sake, he abandons, and will not hear of! He gives his heart to mankind, but to his nearest and most loving he turns his back! . . . Magnificent, glorious love!" cried Nathalie mockingly.

In her dimmed eyes angry fires were burning, the mouth was awry, and the expression of the whole face was gloomy and disagreeable.

Mimi glanced at her mother, lowered her eyes, and remained silent. In her mind's eye she saw many heavy scenes that to Nathalie herself were erased from memory, carried away as she was by the idea of the love and sacrifices which she, "the nearest," had all her life laid at the feet of the heartless husband. She had forgotten the secret councils with the steward and her son, in which the husband's and father's honour were staked. Now she was crying and complaining to her daughter and seeking her sympathy and exculpation for her own self, because she knew that her daughter's heart had been wounded by the same hand which had removed her from its path. But their natures were foreign one to another; they spoke different languages. Mimi bore her grief proudly and in silence, and put it out of Michail's way, preserving in her heart all the tenderness and depth of her love untouched. For her Michail—Papa Michail, as she now called him playfully—occupied the same high place where she had enthroned him in the early days of her childhood. As formerly, she admired all that he did, all that he said. Formerly she used to express her feelings of rapture by kissing his hands, looking deeply into his eyes, calling him by tender names, feeling herself happy in the rays of his brightness. Now she was silent, and only in her eyes, always turned on him with tender love, he might read what had remained untouched and whole in her heart towards him.

Mimi was silent. These quarrels with her mother were distressing to her, and she terminated them generally by keeping silence, in which one could feel the anguish of her heart.

"None of you can fathom how lonely I am, or even wish to," continued Nathalie, moving about the room and stopping at the toilet-table, or at the window, or before the work-table.

Her cold fingers kept touching with an unconscious nervous movement first one thing, then another, and putting them from place to place.

"You are living with your father, who, as I have heard, adores and spoils you; Marie's thoughts are centred in you and her nephew; Boris is wholly absorbed in his pleasures and fancies; only I am alone, quite alone, in this large house, alone with my anguish, my sad thoughts."

Nathalie put her hands to her head, and with a loud sigh raised her eyes to heaven as if taking it as witness.

"Mamma dear . . . if you find it so unbearable to be here alone, would you wish me to come and live with you? . . . I will speak to papa about it," proposed Mimi falteringly, with a slight hesitation.

"Ah, what for? How can you help me? No, no, it is not necessary."

At that instant heavy, uneven footsteps were heard in the distance and a loud abrupt voice. Nathalie rushed to the door.

"Just in time! . . . What a joy for me .... my kind comforter and friend! Come in here; here all is in order and cosy. . . ."

Nathalie led into the room a strange personage, whose aspect did not harmonize with his surroundings, nor with those who were in them. Slightly bending his knees as he walked, and dragging his heels along the floor, a peasant entered and stopped in the doorway. He was dressed in a dark blue peasant's jacket over a light blue silk blouse (as usually worn by the Russian peasants), with a girdle of thick white cord with tassels. With a sharp look in the eyes, placed very near to the bridge of the nose, he fixed them on Mimi and for several seconds stood quite still and silent. Mimi bore the stubborn, impudent and cunning gaze. Only her dark eyebrows quivered and drew closer together, forming a fold across the forehead.

"Maiden or married?" asked Lukà abruptly, without turning away his eyes.

"This is my daughter Mimi. Quite young, but already widowed," Nathalie answered hastily, seeing that Mimi was silent.

"A widow. Living as God wills? . . . Keeping pure? . . . Meek, but proud! . . . Drive away the angel of pride and he will fall at thy feet. . . . Although thy heart is kind, thy woman's pride is immeasurable. . . ."

Lukà did not take his eyes off Mimi, and in his immovably fixed gaze something seemed to quiver and tremble.

"Mamma, it is time for me to go."

Mimi turned away from Lukà with a careless movement and went to the toilet-table, where she had left her hat. She put it on quickly, arranged with customary deftness the escaped ringlets of hair, kissed her mother, and walked with a determined step towards the door, near which Lukà stood, barring her passage.

"Move aside, please," said Mimi firmly, and, without looking at him, quickly left the room.

Lukà tittered naughtily, waved his hand in front of his face with a short gesture, and entered the room.

"Sit down, my kind friend, here, on the sofa. So—here is better. They will serve tea directly." Nathalie was bustling about, trying to make her visitor comfortable.

"No, no, I do not want tea. Do not worry. Sit down nearer. Give me your hand. Well, good-morning."

Lukà came nearer to Nathalie, and they kissed three times, moving the head from right to left, as it is done for Easter.

"Now tell me all; go on, and I will listen and look at you."

Lukà spoke with an accent on the "*o*" and with an abrupt ending of the words.

"What is there to look at, Father Lukà? I have aged still more from the thoughts that are oppressing me."

"Do not be a slave to your thoughts . . . drive all thoughts away, and pray to God."

"I must confess to you, Father Lukà; I must disclose to

you all those thoughts of mine. I know you will understand and help me."

"Lighten your heart, my dear . . . speak as though you were confessing. . . . Does that daughter of yours live with you, or alone by herself?" asked Lukà suddenly, and his eyes glittered with cunning and quivered with a strange small shiver which was a peculiarity of his look.

Lukà stayed a long time, listening to Nathalie's wearisome complaints against her bitter fate. With his own thoughts elsewhere, he continued absently to stroke Nathalie's arms and shoulders, emitting meaningless, disjointed phrases, which comforted her and, together with the stroking motion, soothed the spleen and irritation which were boiling within her.

II

SUFFERING from paralysis in both feet, Prince Alexei Vassilievitch sat in his huge leather armchair on wheels, and with two pairs of pince-nez on his slightly aquiline nose was reading the morning paper. Quite grey, but well preserved, notwithstanding his illness, he gave an idea of a vigorous, handsome and good old age. Elegant and scrupulously tidy, with white, well cared for hands, grey-haired whiskers brushed sideways, and a clean-shaved, sharply prominent chin, he was now only a dear friendly shadow of the former *bon vivant*, and bore his heavy infirmity bravely and meekly. His long and lean legs, wrapped up in a furry rug, were extended in a lifeless and immovable repose. All was as it used to be in the large light study with the tall sheet glass windows; only from the neighbouring bedroom the squeaking of tiny pups was heard no more. The Prince had just finished his lunch and his servant had wheeled him from the dining-room to the study. Though unable to move the Prince was not lonely; the world remembered and still loved him, and every day his numerous friends, acquaintances, and relations visited him. Since Michail had removed to his house he again felt himself in the former atmosphere of pleasures, late hours, women, and seemed to become stronger and younger himself.

"Prince Boris Alexeievitch," said the valet, lifting the drapery of the door.

"Ask him to come in."

Prince Alexei laid aside his newspaper and took off one after another his two pairs of pince-nez, putting them away in their cases. Having found his eyeglass, which was hanging on a broad black ribbon on his breast, he made a

quick adroit movement and the eyeglass flew as if by itself into the place appointed for it, giving the whole face the special worldly look which an eyeglass produces in some faces. A few seconds later steps were heard in the adjoining room, accompanied by the clank of spurs. Prince Bibiche entered with a vigorous and light step, holding in his left hand his cap and pulling off from the right one a white chamois-leather glove.

"Well, what a surprise! And we were just speaking of you yesterday with Michail. You look younger again! Sit down, sit down nearer."

Prince Alexei embraced warmly his former comrade, who was much younger than he, but according to the traditions of the regiment they were all equals, and used the pronoun "thou" in speaking to one another.

"I arrived yesterday, and will not stay long. My wife is building a school, and there are some complications that I must arrange. As you see, I have run away from the country at the most busy time of the autumn accounts."

"Well, I never supposed to find such qualities in you to see you become a faithful husband and a good landowner."

"As to faithful husband, that I still am, but I am a sorry landowner; Aline knows much more than I, and manages the estate better.

"Is your wife as handsome and stylish as ever?"

"Yes, she does not grow older. A wonderful constitution."

"And you are happy and at peace?"

"I confess to it," answered Prince Bibiche, with a playful shrug of his shoulders.

"In the lottery of marriage you have pulled a lucky number, not like most of us."

"That is so, but how many years we spent in getting to know each other, allowing each other perfect liberty."

"Be it as it may, you are at rest and not alone, and Michail and I are lonely and not at rest. However, I cannot complain: I have lived my life. But I am sorry for Michail; all women are crazy about him, but not one has given him great and complete happiness."

"Talking about women, guess whose voice I have been hearing during three whole days in Paris on the other side of the wall of my bedroom in the Grand Hotel? I had come home a little late after a good supper; I was undressing, and suddenly I heard a voice that I seemed to know quite well. . . . I listened; no, I could not remember whose it was, and went to sleep. On the next morning I woke up, and heard that a quarrel was going on beyond the wall—such a quarrel! "Scamp, scoundrel, pig! . . ." A woman's voice was going, deep, sonorous. I must say I lost all desire to sleep. I thought to myself, who can it be among our ladies who has acquired such habits in Paris? And she went on still worse. She began using such words that I lay and nearly burst with laughter. The man's voice was answering phlegmatically and unwillingly, but she went on *comme une vraie machine à gros mots*, each word strung distinctly, like a pearl—ha-ha-ha!"

Prince Bibiche broke into a merry and ringing laugh.

"*Et bien, mon vieux, tu m'intrigues.* How did it go on?" said Prince Alexei, with interest, smiling at the merry souvenirs of Prince Bibiche.

"Go on? I soon gathered that she was only just getting into her stride. 'You fancy,' she screamed, 'that for your handsome snout I am going to squander thousands? We'll see first. . . . I am not a "*cocotte*"; all Petersburg went mad about me. . . . Hand me my stockings, fat-snouted blockhead. . . . Where have you put them?' And here she burst out with——"

Prince Bibiche bent down to Prince Alexei's ear and said something which made the old man throw back his head and burst into a loud merry laugh.

"*C'est impayable . . . c'est impayable!*" he repeated, continuing to laugh more and more.

The plump solid body of Prince Bibiche also shook from irrestrainable laughter. He got out his perfumed handkerchief and wiped the tears from his eyes.

"Who was it?" asked Prince Alexei, when he could speak.

"What, you don't guess?"

"How? Could it be Mashenka?"

"She herself! I met her afterwards in the corridor. *Chic épatant!* Holding her head like a queen. What manners, what movements! But when I remembered the playfulness of her speech I very nearly burst out laughing in her face."

"Ah, Mashenka, Mashenka! She always was quick-tempered . . . boiling over like hot water when angry," said the Prince kindly and lovingly, with a tender remembrance of his years of slavery.

"Yes, Mashenka!" laughed Prince Bibiche. "Notwithstanding her long sojourn abroad, she evidently has not forgotten the Russian language. To say such a thing!"

"And with all that, *mon cher*, she is fascinating.... One ought to know her as I knew her. Such fire, such passionate earnestness in everything. . . . There was no woman —and I have known many in my life—whose little feet I have kissed with such devotion as hers. Those tiny, capricious, authoritative little feet! . . . I have always forgiven everything to a handsome, exquisite, nice woman. Do not you agree with me? We are both of the old school."

"Let us ask Michail," answered Prince Bibiche, rising to meet Gourakin, who had just entered.

"Whom do I see? Your Excellency! . . . Alone, or with your wife?" asked Gourakin, embracing Prince Bibiche.

"Solo, and not for long."

"Well, we'll have a spree. You come with me this evening to the Jerdins' for a party of bridge, and from there to Medvied's to supper."

"We have been laughing here without you to such an extent that I got a stitch in my side. Bibiche has told me of Mashenka's *bons mots*."

Prince Alexei made the General repeat the whole story, and they all laughed again, the jolly and sonorous laugh of Gourakin ringing out in the large spacious rooms of the Prince's palace.

III

PRINCE BIBICHE refused to go to the Jerdins' to play bridge, and it was decided that they would dine at Medvied's, giving rendezvous there to Tchagin and Aleshka Ivikoff, a madcap and rake, who had already run through two large fortunes of his own, and was now as successfully spending his wife's.

Prince Bibiche, Tchagin and Aleshka Ivikoff had been sitting a whole quarter of an hour at a small table in the restaurant; they had seen all that were there, had ordered the *hors d'œuvres*, and still Gourakin had not put in an appearance. The Tartar servant, with the smooth, rosy bald head, softly smiling mouth, and bent back, went about with an expression of serious attention on his face, born of the consciousness of the sort of people he was dealing with and the knowledge of how to deal with them skilfully and knowingly. Several times he went out into the hall, came back again to the waiting guests, tucked his table napkin under his arm and, pulling it out again, announced with an expression of respect and at the same time with a slight rebuke towards the late guest: "Not arrived yet—a bit late." All the servants, boys, and even cooks of the restaurant knew Gourakin, liked and respected him. They considered him an appurtenance of the restaurant. His accounts were made up separately; they were drawn up by the *maître d'hôtel*, and from time to time sent home to him. Gourakin knew that the accounts were not quite right, but he never checked them and never paid them in full. The Roumanian orchestra seemed to rouse up when his stately figure appeared at the other end of the large room with the well-known company. The musicians played the pieces ordered by him willingly and with fire, knowing that they

would have champagne or money sent them. The tips, often tens of roubles, bent the servants' backs, but the administration of the restaurant liked him not only for the money that he spent, but for the inimitable prestige of a real gentleman, who at the same time was remarkably affable in his relations with those of lower rank than himself. Each waiter knew that although Gourakin, like many others, called him up with a negligent movement of the thumb, and said to him sometimes, "What a brute you are, brother!" or even worse, still he recognized in him not only a servant, but a fellow-creature; and that if he lost his place and came to Gourakin for help, the latter would not only get him work, but also assist him with money if he wanted it.

Tchagin was just thinking of going to the telephone when Gourakin's powerful form appeared at the other end of the room. He was moving with a lazy gait, his head slightly thrown backwards and looking straight before him. His face was gloomy and haughty. He hardly gave a look to the well-known Tartar waiter, who with a dexterous movement served him with a chair and flicked off an imaginary fleck of dust from the snow-white tablecloth.

"Why are you so late? We are famished. Alexander Alexandrovitch was just going to call you up on the phone," said Prince Bibiche, shaking hands with Gourakin, and thinking with pleasure of the rich and tasty dinner before them.

Gourakin shook his friends' hands in silence and took the wine-card from the waiter's hand in an absent way.

"Has anything happened? *As-tu des ennuis?*" asked Tchagin, who knew Gourakin well.

Michail raised his eyes to Tchagin and, following his own thoughts, looked at him several seconds with absent eyes. Then he sighed, passed his hand across his forehead, frowned and threw the card aside, missing the table. The waiter picked it up promptly. Michail poured out a wine-glass of cognac and began to eat. He poured out a second, a third glass, and suddenly looked up with a mocking smile.

"Guess what devilry my highly respected spouse has

invented," he said, leaning back in the chair. "I wager, Sasha, that even you, who know her well and long, will not be able to do so. . . . A mean woman down to the marrow of her bones! If she were dead, then even from beyond the grave the old hag would not leave me in peace. . . . About an hour ago she sent me her scoundrel of a Jew with an official request that I pay the debts which she in a burst of generosity has acquitted for me. The Jewish anathema wriggled and wriggled, and at last gave me to understand that if I consent to reinstate myself in the apartments of my lawful owner, then the business might be arranged, otherwise she, protecting the interests of her son, does not deem it necessary to squander her money for a, so to say, stranger. I was simply dumbfounded. 'What does this mean?' asked I. 'Who asked you to pay my debts at the time, and now, when so many years have passed and I have forgotten to think of them, you again raise the whole dust, the devil take you! . . .' The old scoundrel turned this way and that. 'It will not be convenient for Your Excellency in your position as High Equerry to raise a scandal. All Petersburg will hear of it.' 'Ah, you Jewish scamp,' I said, 'remember for your own part, and tell Nathalie Georgievna, that it is just because I am an equerry and not a lackey that I am not for sale, and she will not inveigle me by any means; at any rate, I do not want to have anything to do with you, and if you come to me again I will give you such a thrashing that you will not forget it to your dying day.'"

"Well said, brother! You ought to have done it right away. Fair words butter no parsnips," remarked Ivikoff, swallowing a glassful of cognac and following it up with a piece of *balyk*.

Tchagin stopped eating, took off his pince-nez, wiped it with his handkerchief, put it on again—a sign of agitation with him—and glanced at Michail with a half-confused, half-sad expression.

"Well, I never expected that of Nathalie. Anything you like, but not that."

"And I always expected just that sort of thing, and no

other. A revengeful and mean nature! The devil knows how she carries on with that vile debauchee Lukà, and it seems she wants more. . . . The old hag wants a husband . . . thinks she can buy one with her money. . . ."

Michail's eyes burned angrily; he was violently excited, drank champagne in large draughts, and ate little.

"Do you know, Misha, I am sure that it is the steward's doing. Does not he reckon on some commission here from your part? . . . One ought to find out and see if it is so."

"No, you just tell me what is it she wants of me?" continued Gourakin without listening to Tchagin. "I have borne with her all my life; at last I got free and went away, demanding nothing from her, except that she forget all about my existence. Well then, no! She found a point to attack. . . ."

"Do not be so hasty and do not excite yourself. If you like, I will go to Nathalie, talk to her and try to make her hear reason," said Tchagin, laying a comforting hand on Michail's sleeve.

"Be so kind. It is really devil knows what! . . ."

Michail's wrath began to be appeased little by little, and soon he was laughing unconcernedly, while listening to the piquant anecdotes which Aleshka Ivikoff was such a good hand at relating. The conversation went on. A third bottle of iced champagne was served: The people come to dine were beginning to disperse. In the large room there was the period of quiet when only some belated diners still remain here and there, and the suppers have not yet commenced.

Ivikoff took leave of his comrades and went off to the ballet.

Prince Bibiche, a landowner in the same government and district as Tchagin, was exposing his views on the defects of the *zemstvo*.* Tchagin was differing quietly but firmly. Prince Bibiche, a little warmed by the wine, was becoming heated, and by his frequent looks at Gourakin seemed to

* County Councils.—Translator.

be calling for his opinion to side with himself, but the latter, moving back his chair and leaning on it, was smoking his cigar and attentively listening to the orchestra, which was executing with great feeling a piece that Gourakin had ordered after having sent the musicians two bottles of champagne.

Looking round the room, Gourakin noticed behind the columns at the other end of it a stout gentleman with a triple chin, enormous stomach, and very broad back. Gourakin was in financial relations with him; he rose and with a leisurely step advanced towards him. In coming up to the columns he saw, to his surprise, behind one of them Bestoujeva, who was sitting at a small table with a naval officer. He had seen her during the day, and she had not told him she was going to dine at Medvied's.

Very much spoilt by women's attentions and caresses, Gourakin either did not know how to be jealous or did not care to be so, and in such cases, when he met with serious cause for it, he generally gave the lady full liberty and stepped aside, but to return no more.

Bestoujeva knew this. On seeing Michail she called him up to her by a sign, presented to him her companion—just arrived, very old friend, as she took care to inform Gourakin—and asked him to join them, but Gourakin refused, saying that he was not alone, and moved on towards the stout gentleman, Count Stavsky.

The columns had prevented him from seeing that the Count was not alone, and only on coming quite near he remarked a red-haired, very elegant lady, sitting opposite to the Count and looking about her with a wearied expression. Gourakin wanted to turn back, but Stavsky saw him and with a loud exclamation rose to greet him.

"A-ah! Very glad to see you! Allow me to present you to my cousin. Madame, this is the famous *charmeur*, Monsieur Gourakin."

The lady raised her large brown eyes with a friendly smile.

"Excuse me for interrupting your conversation," said Gourakin, seating himself and examining with pleasure the

vivacious, interesting face with the large, light brown eyes, which seemed full of bright merry sparks.

"On the contrary, I am very glad to make your acquaintance. Although I live almost always abroad and am very seldom in Petersburg, I have heard of you. A lady told me that you were the most fascinating man in all Petersburg, and that you were born an Apollo and a bacchant. You must agree that it is very interesting to meet with a son of the Sun, especially when one is in the society of a Lucullus."

The red-haired woman glanced towards Stavsky with a slight expression of disgust. His head was as bald as a knee, and when it was bent over a plate it seemed to be stuck on to a stout body without a sign of a neck between. He made one think of a sucking pig. His thick, down-hanging lips moved rapidly and with a smacking noise; the small eyes ran greedily from dish to dish, as if he was testing each piece before swallowing it up.

"Ah, my angel, you know very well that I am of the earth earthy, and that I love to eat; but I know how to appreciate beauty, especially in the form of a woman. You cannot imagine, Michail Vladimirovitch, what enjoyment it is to be in my cousin's company," Stavsky said between the mouthfuls and not taking his eyes off the dishes which the waiter was serving. "A wonderful, simply wonderful woman! . . . Here, this way, place it here . . ." he interrupted himself, turning to the waiter. "Yes, I can tell you that my cousin is! . . ." He kissed the tips of his fingers folded together. "Talent, beauty—she has all the graces. How she sings! What training! . . . No, my friend, you need not put that sauce before me, you know I cannot bear it. Bring some tartar, and quickly. . . . You just look, what hands she has! My angel, give me your hand to kiss. . . ."

"Enough, Count . . . eat your fish and do not praise me—you know that I hate it."

"Well, I will not, I will not. . . . Do not knit your pretty brows. Pour some wine to His Excellency," he said to the waiter, who had brought a bottle wrapped in a

napkin. "Let us drink to my beautiful little cousin Sophie."

"No, I want to drink *pour la joie de vivre.*" Sophie raised her glass with a flashing merry glance into Michail's eyes.

Gourakin answered her with an admiring, sparkling look, and, touching the edge of her glass with his own, added:

"*Pour la joie de vivre près de vous!* . . ."

With a scarce perceptible gesture Sophie tossed her head; a subtle smile lurked for a moment on her ripe red lips, and she lowered her eyes, hiding their expression.

". . . In my soul a storm is brewing. . . . It is surging and rejoicing . . ." sang Gourakin under his voice, following the skilful and passionate tones of Goulesco's* bow.

Sophie raised her eyes to Michail's face. He was looking straight into her eyes. A wave of singular power, born instantly from the sudden meeting of two persons, complete strangers until that moment, seemed to overflow the young woman's whole being, and she felt a sharp quiver run through her body. She knew herself to be changing colour, and, bending her head low over her fingers, appeared to be examining her rings.

"Yesterday at the English Club someone was saying that you are selling your race horse," said Stavsky to Gourakin, stuffing his mouth with the juicy green leaves of salad.

"No, I am not selling him. Who told you? On the contrary, I want to buy a second one."

"Ah, spendthrift, spendthrift! . . . You will not believe, *ma cousine*, what a generous nature his is! . . ." said Stavsky to Sophie, wiping his mouth with his table napkin and taking breath.

"And even now he is a handsome man, but you should have seen him twenty years ago! . . . I remember I once entered the theatre in Moscow, and was just exchanging bows with the occupants of the Governor-General's box when I remained simply thunderstruck with amazement; I saw him standing there like a picture. . . . Ah, how handsome, how handsome he was! And what was wonderful,

* The band conductor.—Translator.

never a shadow of coxcombry! And how he sings tsigane songs! . . . What valses he writes! . . . Eh, here"—he called to a waiter—"go and tell the orchestra to play a valse of His Excellency."

"I'll tell them myself."

Gourakin excused himself, rose and moved towards the orchestra. Bestoujeva stopped him when he was going back.

"Who is that handsome lady with whom you are sitting?"

"A cousin of the Count's."

"A provincial?"

"I believe so. She lives abroad."

"We are leaving now. I ask you to tea this evening. Come, we will expect you."

In Bestoujeva's voice a certain insistence was heard.

"Maybe I will come, but do not expect me."

Gourakin kissed Bestoujeva's hand and returned to Stavsky's table. The orchestra played several of the melodious and pretty valses of his composition. Bestoujeva, with the naval officer, passed on their way out; she tried to catch Michail's eye, but he was so engaged in conversation with the Count's cousin that he did not notice either her look or her departure. Tchagin and Prince Bibiche had left without waiting for him any longer. Stavsky was looking at his watch, and at last reminded his lady that they were due at a certain house that evening.

"I am feeling very well here, and I will not go anywhere," answered Sophie, and read Gourakin's thanks in the glance which he fixed on her.

"Impossible, *ma cousine*. I am expected there to make up a game of bridge; I gave my word that I would come," Stavsky remarked, and his fat puffed-up face took a half pitiful, half sullen expression.

"But I am not keeping you, my brilliant cousin," laughed Sophie. "You are not tied to me. If I feel inclined to come to this evening's party, Michail Vladimirovitch will accompany me."

"Yes, but what shall I say there? I promised them to bring you."

"Anything you like. However, I know you: you will tell everyone confidentially that you have left me here with Monsieur Gourakin."

"Ah, what a malignant woman! For whom do you take me?"

"For a well-known Petersburg gossip, that's all."

"You are beginning to be cruel to me, therefore I had really better depart."

Stavsky went. Gourakin and Sophie did not remark how the time flew, and it was very late when Gourakin brought her home in his motor-car.

IV

Two days later everyone was speaking of Gourakin's new infatuation. Rumours of it reached Nathalie, and added the last drop to her cup of revengeful, jealous suffering. The liaison with Bestoujeva, which had continued several years, had not tormented her lately, because she knew that Michail's love had cooled, and that he did not break with Bestoujeva only because she knew how to keep up their relations. On hearing of her husband's new conquest Nathalie flew into a terrible rage. This fact had proved once more how different their positions were: while she, grown old and retired from the world, could not find a moment's rest from her sad thoughts and deep dejection, he continued to enjoy life and all its pleasures. The spirit of evil and revenge entered into her. Not receiving any answer to the letter written by the hand of Moissei Borisovitch, Nathalie, led on by spite, wrote to her husband herself, and indicated the term for the payment of the bills, threatening, in case of non-payment, to summon him before a court of law.

Mimi, to whom Gourakin showed the letter, was terribly indignant, and with her temper up hastened to her mother for an explanation. Nathalie met her with reproaches for pampering Michail's vices.

"You are saying all this, mamma, only to hurt me, and I will not attach much importance to your words; but I am surprised how you can threaten with a public scandal a man whose name you and your son bear now, and your daughter used to bear."

Mimi, always very equable, was strongly excited.

"*Oh, je m'en fiche, je m'en fiche de ce que dira le monde,*" screamed Nathalie, beside herself, giving vent to her

increasing wrath, "*Je m'en fiche de vous tous.* The cup of my patience is overfull. . . . I have had enough of the rôle of a victim. . . . I will revenge myself at last. . . . Let him become a beggar, let him know sadness and dejection, as I know them. . . . He has infected all of you with a certain poison. . . . You, and Aunt Marie, and Prince Alexei, and Tchagin, and all, all are ready to defend his profligacy and worship his craziness. But I've had enough."

Nathalie's face was covered with red patches; she kept starting up and sitting down again, and was beside herself with excitement. Mimi tried to reason with her, but Nathalie put up her hands as if to ward her off, and ordered her to leave her in peace and go away. After Mimi's departure she had a nervous attack, and the doctor had to attend her.

On the next day Tchagin, who had acquired the name of peacemaker among his friends and many acquaintances, called on Nathalie.

The porter told him the orders had been given that no one was to be received, but Tchagin enjoyed special privileges in the Gourakin family, and therefore he sent the man to announce his arrival, and was invited to enter. Nathalie was reclining on a lounge chair; her face looked pale and drawn, and the hand she extended to him was very hot.

"Well, Sasha, have you also come to me as a mediator?"

"I met your doctor this morning, and he complained to me very seriously about you," said Tchagin, not taking any notice of the leading question and seating himself near her sofa. "He told me that your nerves are in a state of perfect anarchy, and that, instead of mastering them, you are constantly agitating and exciting yourself."

"Certainly it is very easy to give advice. All my life is a burning slow fire. . . . I wonder that I live so long. Even Mimi has learnt to unnerve me. All are pitiless towards me, while to him all is forgiven, and he is even encouraged. . . ."

Nathalie reached forward to take some smelling-salts from the table near by, and nearly dropped them.

"If you excite yourself so, dear Nathalie, then I will go away," said Tchagin, noticing how her fingers were trembling.

"No, please stay; you understand me better than the others, and it is easier to talk to you. Cover my feet with the fur rug. There, you see, my hands are quite hot, and my feet are like ice."

Tchagin wrapped up her feet carefully, ordered hot tea to be brought, and little by little led her on to speak of her husband without angry irritation. Having found her feeble point, Tchagin spoke of Michail without defending him or taking his part. He only endeavoured to prove by logic that in raising a family scandal she was complicating still more her position towards her relations and in respect to her own personal life.

"Personal life? My dear Sasha, have I ever had any personal life with Michail? I will admit to you that I lived for myself with Volynsky, and if I was not perfectly happy with him, at least I had peace of mind. From the moment that I met Michail I lost my own personality, I gave up all my thoughts, wishes, all my love to him. Sasha, you must know how I loved him . . ." said Nathalie with a moan.

Tchagin was silent.

"Tell me, could anyone love more than I loved him? And what have I in return?"

Tchagin continued to keep silence.

"Am I not right? Is it not so?"

"No, my dear friend, no, it is not so," said Tchagin at last, firmly and distinctly.

"What is not so? I do not understand you."

"You never loved him. You loved yourself, and only yourself."

"*Mais . . . mais vous divaguez*, Sasha. . . . Think what you are saying! . . ."

Tchagin took Nathalie's hot hand in his and slowly disclosed before her the whole history of her life since the moment that she had fallen in love with Gourakin, and in spite of the harm to his career, in spite of the displeasure of his grandmother and father, whom he deeply respected,

despite even her own conscience, with which she had compromised by lying to him and calling him the father of the expected child, she had striven for and obtained her divorce and made him marry her. Tchagin told her how Michail had suffered at first, feeling Nathalie's complete indifference to everything that interested him and that he loved.

"To love anyone means to strive to make our beloved one happy, so that our love should bring him joy—that is, good, and not suffering. You, Nathalie, only thought of yourself; and your happiness demanded that Michail should be interested in no one nor in anything but yourself. That is where the discord commenced. If you had loved him with a real earnest love, could you ever have conceived the wish to revenge yourself on him so cruelly, so shamefully, as you are doing now?"

While Tchagin was speaking Nathalie did not once interrupt him. She lay back with closed eyes, and only her quivering eyelids betrayed her agitation. When Tchagin stopped speaking, she raised herself very slowly, and with a changed strange face looked him straight in the eyes.

"That means that I have lived my life, so to say, in vain? . . . I have loved no one? . . . I must admit that I have really loved no one, except Michail; but, according to you, I have not even loved him. . . . Listen, Sasha, if I am willing to raise such a family scandal, believe me, I alone know what is guiding me. You think it is a desire to revenge myself? You believe that? . . . It is not so—no, no . . . I want to get him back . . . to get him to come back by any means whatever. He cannot, I know very well, pay the amount of those bills, he will have to enter into negotiations with me, he will try to discover ways and means, and I will carefully lead him to think of a reconciliation. . . ."

"What have you devised? Does there exist anywhere in the whole world a logical law which would permit a cruel revengeful act to bring about beneficial results? Was I not right in saying that you have ever been, and are now, guided exclusively by a selfish desire for your own happiness?"

Nathalie again laid her head on the cushions and, knitting her brows, remained silent a long time with her eyes fixed on one spot.

"To have lived a whole life in vain! . . . How dreadful . . . how cruel . . . if it is so!"

Nathalie did not say anything else, and Tchagin soon left her. He was sure that their conversation would produce its effect: she would listen to reason and desist from beginning a lawsuit. However, he was mistaken. A few days before the term Moissei Borisovitch wrote to Gourakin in his wife's name, reminding him of the date for the payment of the bills. For the first time in his life Michail felt himself in a position from which there was no outlet. After Moissei Borisovitch's visit he had been indignant at his wife's action, but he had felt convinced that it would all end in negotiations, in the course of which Nathalie would understand that no threats of hers could make him cross the threshold of her house for even half an hour. The total amount of the bills paid several years ago was so considerable that he could not refund it at present, the more so as, since he had left her, being unaccustomed to deprive himself of anything, he had incurred new and heavy debts. This second reminder produced an overwhelming effect on Gourakin. He understood that Nathalie would follow up her cruel determination to the end. For the first time in his life he felt the ground giving way under his feet; he had such outbursts of rage that the doctors feared some serious nervous attack. He raged like a wounded wild beast, and even Tchagin, who always had had a certain influence on him, used to leave his rooms quite disheartened, and say with a shrug of his shoulders:

"It's a bad business, I'm afraid."

At last, after an irrepressible burst of fury Michail had a serious heart attack, and was obliged to keep his bed. Marie and Mimi, thoroughly frightened and suffering for him, stayed near him all the time.

IV.

THE last term for the payment of the bills arrived. After her conversation with Tchagin Nathalie had given strict orders that neither Marie nor Mimi should be received; she feared their entreaties and exhortations, to which she had firmly decided not to listen. All these days she had been living in a state of nervous excitement. Sometimes it seemed to her that she would not be able to bear this chaos of thoughts, this tense expectation of events. Only Moissei Borisovitch, with his cool and calm assurance, brought her a little encouragement.

"Rest assured, Your Excellency," he would say with a venomous smile. "Michail Vladimirovitch will rave and storm, and in the end he will deign to have recourse to negotiations. Believe me that it will be so. He will wait until the term comes, and if he sees that you are not giving way, then he will either come himself, or send his attorney."

The steward's words seemed to comfort Nathalie, and made her think that he must be right and the result could be no other. The night before the fatal day Nathalie passed without a wink of sleep. Her over-excited brain pictured to her the different scenes of the forthcoming meeting with her husband. She tried to foresee what he would say, and what she would answer him; she composed and learnt by heart whole sentences, which a moment later she found not sufficiently convincing. . . . Sometimes she pictured the meeting as stormy, and she prepared cutting, well-deserved reproaches against her husband; then again she seemed to see him defeated and broken down, and herself extending her hand to him in reconciliation and crying on his breast. . . . Her thoughts were in a whirl, her head burned; she rose several times, walked about the room; then she would ring up her son by telephone in his

apartments downstairs, and each time with a painful twinge at her heart she would hear the same answer from his valet:

"Boris Michailovitch has not come home yet."

"Tell him that I ask him to see me to-morrow morning early. . . . Say that I rang him up in the night, that I am ill and want to speak to him. . . ."

Nathalie would hang up the receiver with aching heart and a feeling of complete loneliness, and again the torturing brain-work, the whirl of thoughts, would go on. Morning found her sitting in her armchair, with a drawn grey face and dark circles under her eyes. Her hands, hot and dry, lay helplessly on her lap, her temples ached. Her greatest desire was to be able to forget herself in sleep; but the nervous system had reached a point of over-excitement, when the exhausted body and brain long for rest, but sleep flees away and will not ease the tired head for a single moment.

In the maid's room the electric bell rang earlier than usual from Nathalie's chamber. She ordered her bath to be prepared, hoping it would soothe and refresh her. At present, with the awakened day, its movement and noise, the tedious and torturing brain-work had ceased and only bits of phrases mechanically retained by the memory kept repeating themselves wearisomely and insistently, without calling up any pictures or images.

". . . You have lived all your life trampling on the suffering of a woman's heart . . . trampling on the suffering of a woman's heart . . . woman's heart . . . suffering of a woman's heart . . ." whispered Nathalie to herself, combing her hair, and not noticing that it did not need any further combing, or that the comb did not even touch it. This phrase, composed during the night, was part of a long tirade which she imagined herself saying to her husband. Now she had forgotten it all, and was only mechanically repeating disjointed bits. . . . "She remained alone in a cold desert . . . alone in a desert . . ." another such phrase hammered at her brain, until by an effort of her will she drove it away, but it was followed by yet another one, and so on, without end. . . .

She took her bath and ordered her breakfast to be served in her room. At the same time they brought her the morning papers and letters, but with a tired gesture Nathalie laid them aside, with no strength to read them.

"Go downstairs," she said to her maid, "and find out whether Boris Michailovitch has come back, and if Semen has told him that I desire to see him."

The maid came back with the answer that Boris Michailovitch had returned with two comrades, that Semen had transmitted Her Excellency's order, but that he had answered that he would come later on, after he had had a rest; and that now he and his friends were asleep.

Nathalie stifled a sigh.

"She remained alone in a cold desert . . . alone in a cold desert, cold desert . . ." whispered the lips.

After her breakfast Nathalie gave orders to receive no one. She hoped that after her bath she would be able to have some sleep. The maid, after drawing the heavy curtains and shutting the door, left her alone. All was quiet around her, only the noise of the street was heard dully through the double panes of the huge windows. Nathalie sat quite still in her armchair, with closed eyes, trying to sleep, but in the silence and inaction the scenes of the forthcoming day began to picture themselves again, mixing the possible with the impossible, fancy with real life. In this state of semi-delirium she passed a long time. Someone knocked at her door softly. Nathalie opened her eyes.

"Come in. What is wanted?" she asked in a vexed voice.

"Your Excellency, this was to be given you immediately."

The maid was carrying a letter on a silver tray. Nathalie recognized from afar the well-known envelope of thick English paper.

"Any answer waiting?" she asked, taking up the letter with trembling fingers.

"No answer."

"Very well. You may go. Shut the door."

Nathalie's heart beat so violently that for several minutes she pressed both hands to it and remained immovable, with cold hands and feet, gasping for breath. What was he

writing? . . . What was he asking her? . . . What will she learn directly, this minute? . . . "Lord, help . . . give me strength! . . ."

Letting her long fur pelerine slip from her shoulders, she raised herself from her armchair and, feeling her knees trembling and bending under her, moved towards the writing-table. Hurriedly cutting open the hard thick paper of the envelope, she opened it and, catching her breath, ran her eyes greedily and rapidly over the lines, written in a firm, distinct hand:

"Simultaneously with this letter my attorney will pay into your office the money which Aunt Marie brought me to-day from herself and from Mimi. With the deepest contempt that one can feel towards a woman and a human being, I throw it in your face.—MICHAIL GOURAKIN."

The letter fell from her hands. With a stifled groan Nathalie pressed her hands to her head and rushed blindly hither and thither. In her white flannel dressing-gown, with the long train and broad sleeves, with wide open eyes full of despair, she looked like a fearsome ghost caught on the earth after sunrise, having lost her way to her home underground. Without reasoning, moved by a blind instinct, Nathalie sped out of her bedroom; moaning pitifully, and pressing her head in her hands, she passed the drawing-rooms and the *salon* with extraordinary lightness and swiftness, descended the stairs, and found herself in her son's apartments. She ran into his bedroom, and suddenly stopped as if thunderstruck. The disarranged room, with the appurtenances of a man's toilet lying about, the creased bed, were empty, but from the adjoining room, through the half-open door, the melodious tender notes of Chopin's valse in B minor were heard. The sounds were flowing like pearls, rolling from under the fingers on the keys of the piano, filling the air with delicate flowery designs. . . . For the first time in her life Nathalie understood the power of sounds. They surrounded her, they flowed into her soul, full of despair and sadness, and drowned in their sorrowful waves all her world, all her life, with its cold dark fog of a

solitary existence unneeded by anyone, full of grief, despair and bitter fruitless regrets. It seemed to her that not sounds, but tears, were rolling and pouring over her . . . they were reaching up to her throat, choking her, overflowing her brain. . . . Her ear caught the careless merry laugh of her son; the feeling of loneliness penetrated still deeper into her soul, shaken and hovering over the chasm of a mortal despair . . . and the sounds continued to rush on and roll up to her, flowing over and scattering about like the pearly drops of inexhaustible tears. . . .

Her dry fixed gaze suddenly became dim, as if a cloud passed over it; then suddenly it flashed brighter again. Despair, horror and determination gleamed with a glare like lightning . . . the eyelids, like butterflies, fluttered above this flash of madness. Nathalie stretched out her hand to a small table near by, shivered from head to foot, took up a tiny revolver like a plaything, and pressed it to her temple. Amid the running, rippling, rushing pearly notes the sharp dry crack of a discharged revolver was heard. Nathalie staggered weakly forward, swayed, and fell backward, dead. . . .

VI

More than six months had gone by. The train from Berlin, overfilled with people, was slowly approaching the Russian frontier. In a compartment of the first class Mimi, in mourning for her mother, and Marie Gourakina were hastily collecting their things. Marie seemed very much excited. Her plump face was flushed with two red spots, she was breathing heavily, and sat in moody silence. Mimi, with a serious face and drawn eyebrows, kept watching her aunt, or leaning her forehead against the window-pane and protecting her eyes from the light by means of her hands pressed to her temples, trying to see something in the darkness outside through which the train was moving slowly, as if carefully picking its way.

"Nothing to be seen?" asked Marie, seating herself and folding her hands with an air of tired and ready-for-anything submission.

"No, auntie, one can see nothing; it is dark all round."

"Lord, if only we would arrive! If only we were in our own land!" sighed Marie, and closed her eyes with a tired air.

"We are approaching, gentlemen and ladies. . . . Verjbolovo is quite near," said someone's jolly loud voice in the corridor.

In the compartment all became alert. Besides Mimi and Marie there were four more ladies.

"Thank God! . . . *Dieu soit loué!*" Marie opened her eyes quickly and made the sign of the cross. Mimi again pressed her face to the window, behind which the same darkness reigned.

"No lights to be seen," said she, and began to put on her hat. "Aunt dear, here are your gloves. . . . Where is

my scarf? . . . Ah yes, we must prepare our passports; they are in the little bag, I think, auntie. Now, that is all. . . . Let me arrange your hair."

Mimi rapidly, but without undue haste, took out her aunt's and her own passports and placed them in her pocket, arranged a lock of Marie's hair that had escaped from under the hat, tied on her veil, put on her gloves, took up her umbrella, and with an anxious feeling of expectation placed herself at the doors of the compartment, gazing beyond the crowd in the corridor at the window of the *wagon*.

"Why are we moving so slowly?" In Marie's voice a note of anxiety was again heard.

"We will stop soon now, auntie; do not let us worry beforehand; it will not be long now," answered Mimi, turning a troubled face towards her aunt, and endeavouring in vain to give it an unconcerned expression.

The train was moving more and more slowly, and came to a stop at last. The passengers were bustling about and hurriedly, pushing and pressing on one another, coming out on the platform. All round reigned a fearsome, inexplicable darkness. Only in the distance, out of an open door of the station building a dim ray of light stretched across the way. The whole place was encumbered with boxes, chests, and luggage. The travellers, on reaching the frontier which all had been waiting for with such impatience, were quite subdued and still now, and carrying silently in their hands their bags and portmanteaux, moved towards the lighted doors of the station house.

"D——n! what darkness! One can break one's head against these chests! . . ." a man's voice ejaculated with petulance.

Marie, breathing heavily, was groping her way carefully. Mimi was leading her by the arm.

"Why is it so dark here?" asked Marie of a railway porter who was near.

"It was ordered not to light the lamps," he answered unwillingly.

"Why not?" insisted Marie.

"I don't know."

The passports had been taken from the passengers, but there was no one in the inspection-room. People began to feel perplexed, and the anxiety increased.

Although the door leading into the restaurant was not shut, all was dark and empty. On every side anxious questions were heard regarding the time of departure of the train, and no one could obtain a definite answer. The disturbed travellers, who had survived the fear of internment in Berlin, and with great trouble found places in the train that had just arrived, and who had been hoping for rest in their own land, were now perplexed and disturbed at the aspect of the empty dark station. The train had disappeared noiselessly, and in the warm evening darkness everything seemed to be full of silence and mystery. Only the far-away dark blue heavens were strewn with brightly twinkling stars and seemed quite indifferent to what was going on on the small, eternally troubled earth.

"Mimi, what does this mean? How long shall we have to wait here?" asked Marie disconcertedly.

"They say the Germans are advancing this way . . ." said someone in a tone of weight and meaning.

"What do you say? Coming here?" Marie's voice broke, and she caught Mimi's hand. "Mimi dearest, what will become of us? I am not afraid for myself . . . I am an old woman, I need have no fear, but you . . ."

"Auntie, for God's sake, do not agitate yourself. We must consider. Let us ask someone . . ." Mimi comforted her, feeling at the same time an increasing alarm.

"Stay here with the things; I shall go and try to find the Colonel of the gendarmes."

Marie entered the inspection-room and from there the offices of the station staff. In the half-dark corridor she met the Colonel, who looked pale and unlike his usual self. He knew Mimi well and always tried to be specially polite and attentive to her as the daughter of a high-placed personage.

"Colonel, what is happening?" Marie turned to him excitedly. "Where is the train? When is it starting?"

"I know nothing, nothing, madame. . . . The trains are

not my department. . . . I am losing my head . . . I have sent three telegrams, I cannot do more. There are no trains."

"But what is to be done? I am with Volynsky's daughter. . . . We cannot remain here!"

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders with a nervous smile.

At that moment a strange dull roar was heard and something seemed to burst quite near to the station. Marie pressed her hand to her heart and with a dumb question in her wide open, frightened eyes glanced at the Colonel.

With a gesture of despair he thrust his hand in his hair and clenched it hardly, painfully. His face was quite pale. He bent down to Marie and said in a rapid undertone:

"I can only say one thing: flee, flee from here, and as quickly as possible. . . ."

"But how? How can we flee, Colonel, in this darkness? Help us . . . bestir yourself . . . find an engine-driver . . . we will pay. . . ."

"That is not the question!" he cried impatiently. "There are no engines. Go out on the platform; I will ask directly, I will do all that is in my power . . . wait there. . . . There they go again, the scoundrels!"

The same dull, dismal and awesome roar was heard; the windows rattled in reply. The Colonel disappeared in a moment. Marie hurried out on to the platform, where the crowd, half in astonishment, half in consternation, was listening to the repeated discharges of the guns. These menacing sounds, rushing through the blackness of the night, seemed to fill it with the ominous phantoms of death and blood. All were still, and everyone's face wore an expression of concentrated consciousness of the importance of the present moment. There was no crowding together, no loud exclamations. They mustered close to one another and felt that all were brothers. Several men, talking softly about the necessity of obtaining a train, moved along the railway line in the direction from whence came a sound of voices. They soon disappeared, as if drowned, beyond the

ray of light which fell through the open door of the inspection-room. Two little girls in white straw hats and white piqué cloaks were crying softly, huddled up against a tall young lady. At each volley of the guns Mimi pressed her aunt's hand firmly and tried to control herself, but her face was very pale. The men were comforting the ladies and children and, one after another passing the ray of light, disappeared in the darkness, joining the far-away talking voices. Suddenly the figure of a stout blond man in a soft felt hat emerged out of the night:

"It seems there will be a train; an engine and an engine-driver have been found."

In the deep stillness his voice sounded very loud. He leaped upon the platform, and was instantly surrounded. Taking up his hand luggage, he reminded everyone of the necessity of getting their passports, and the passengers moved in a thick crowd through the inspection-room. At the end of the corridor, in a small, dimly-lighted office, the passports and a few corded books and papers were lying in disorder on a large table. The travellers crowded round the latter, and everyone began to search for his own passport with difficulty. Some of them appeared to have fallen under the table. Mimi was lucky enough to find hers and her aunt's very soon, and she hurried back to Marie, who had remained outside.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I advise you to follow me."

The blond gentleman was standing at the end of the platform and peering intently into the distance, wrapped up in a fearful and gruesome darkness.

"The train is on the reserve track, and we shall have far to go. We shall have to find our places in the dark; no lights will be allowed."

He spoke hurriedly, but his movements were sure, and all seemed to breathe easier, all believed that there would be a train.

With hand-bags and travelling sacks in their hands the passengers, stepping carefully on the railway sleepers in the darkness, moved in a vacillating, hardly visible crowd along the line of the railway.

". . . Oh, Lord, if we only could get there somehow!" soft sighs were heard.

A great black immovable mass cut off their path. It was a long row of railway cars. A conductor, hiding his lantern under the lappet of his coat, passed by Marie and Mimi. Someone asked him a question.

"Get in, ladies and gentlemen, let's hope we'll be off," he answered, and the long-suffering travellers seemed to gather courage from the cheery tone of his voice.

One of the passengers who had got in first lit up the corridor of the car with an electric pocket-lamp, and Mimi, leading Marie by the arm, espied a compartment with soft seats. They entered it, laid down their things gropingly, and sat down. The passengers were finding places, cautiously lighting matches and talking softly and in whispers. A sudden sharp volley from the guns made all the panes in the windows tremble. An invisible baby began to cry in a loud and frightened voice. Little by little all were seated. Marie took off her hat, placed it on her lap, and, making the sign of the cross, softly said some prayers. Mimi, closing her eyes, and reposing her tired head against the cushioned back of the seat, was intently listening to what was going on there in the darkness beyond the open window of the train, and at the same time her thoughts were running over all that had happened with the rapidity of a whirlwind during the last days. If it were not for the ominous volleys from the guns, breaking through the darkness and reminding one of what had irrevocably occurred, she was ready to think of the last two days as of a nightmare, they had been so strange, so different from her ordinary experience. Before her mind's eyes there passed as in a picture the cruel faces of the Germans at the Friedrichsbahnhof, their rude broken speech, their threats and insults. A gloomy hostile shadow had lain on their way up to the frontier.

War! . . . Why? From where had this terrible phantom arisen? How could it have happened that his death-bringing breath had infected with the poison of mean spite and low revenge a nation of centuries of culture, of tradi-

tions, a nation of deep and great thinkers, a nation which had reached the heights of civilization? Another volley! . . . Again the night's blackness had been broken by a savage call to destruction and fratricide. . . . Boris . . . he will also go to the war . . . probably he is going already . . . and papa? . . .

Mimi started. In her heart she called only Gourakin by the name of father. For her he was invariably the same tenderly beloved father of her far-away and happy childhood.

"Aunt, how do you think—is Boris still in Petersburg?"

"I hope so, my dear."

"And what do you think of papa?"

"You mean, is he in Petersburg?"

"No, not that. I am afraid he will go to the war."

"I have thought of that already," sighed Marie.

Someone running past the car called out something. . . . "Telegram sent" . . . was heard out of the distance. The train moved. The steel of the chains and wheels clanked with a metallic sound, and the train, very slowly, as if feeling its way in the dark, without a whistle or a signal, smoothly sped forward. A sigh of relief burst from the breasts of the invisible passengers. The black silhouettes of the water-pumps and the station buildings moved silently past the open windows, then the darkness seemed to be lifted, and the deep blue sky, stretching over a wide expanse and strewn with the brightly twinkling far-away stars, seemed to lower itself over the earth and looked in at the windows of the dark train speeding on its way among the fields.

VII

A TELEGRAM sent on the way did not arrive at its destination, and when the train with the tired passengers arrived in Petersburg there was no one at the station to meet Marie and Mimi. Marie, with a terrible headache after the sleepless nights spent in a sitting position, with nerves unstrung, sank into a chair overcome with exhaustion, while waiting for Volynsky's motor-car, which Mimi had called up on the telephone. Mimi was just going out to see if it had arrived when the door opened and Volynsky entered.

"My God, my God, what anxiety I have been through!" he cried, kissing Marie's hand and embracing Mimi.

"Like a thunderclap all this dreadful catastrophe and mobilization. I was losing my head fearing for you. . . . What happiness that you are safe! Both I and Michail Vladimirovitch telegraphed to Verjbolovo, and got no answer."

Carefully leading Marie, Volynsky placed her and Mimi in the automobile.

"And your luggage?" he asked.

"All lost. We are happy that we are safe and sound ourselves. It is impossible to describe what is going on in Berlin."

Mimi began to relate warmly to her father all the rude and cruel things that the Germans had done to Russian travellers, and of which she had been a witness.

"A nightmare . . . a wild nightmare!" said Volynsky with horror, gazing intently into the tired face of his daughter, happy to see her safe again. Mimi took Marie home first and handed her over into the hands of her companion, an Englishwoman of middle age, reserved, con-

scientious and very kind-hearted, who had replaced since three years Miss Jones, who had passed away into a better world without suffering.

Reassured about her aunt, having kissed Miss Robinson and promised to let Michail know of their return by telephone, Mimi hurried downstairs, where Volynsky was awaiting her in the automobile. Notwithstanding her fatigue, she refreshed herself after her journey, had lunch with her father, and went to Gourakin, who, on hearing of their return, had asked her to come to him. Mimi found him at lunch. He rose to meet her and gave her a friendly kiss on the forehead.

"I am glad, very glad to know that you have returned. I have been very much frightened for both of you," he said, turning to the table and indicating a place beside him.

"And so it is war. Well, we shall go to beat the Germans. . . ."

Gourakin's face was serious. In the eyes, always sparkling with a careless joyfulness, there had appeared since the catastrophe with Nathalie a deeper and graver expression. It could not be said of him that he looked much older, but in all his personality there seemed to have been born a new, definite thoughtfulness, which had lent to the tone of his voice, his movements, and his glance the finishing touch of life, which speaks of hidden suffering, told to no one, and buried deep at the bottom of the soul. It seemed he had begun to take less notice of the people who crowded round him greedy for pleasures, and held communion with his own self.

"Are you troubled, papa?" asked Mimi, catching a certain look in his eyes.

"Certainly. Boris is leaving to-morrow evening."

"How already?" asked Mimi in a frightened voice.

"All the Guards have gone. Not a minute to be lost," said Gourakin seriously. "Yes, we have a strong and bold enemy to deal with. Russia understands the importance of this war and has risen like one man. All the disturbances, all the agitations, created by the initiative of these same base Germans, have instantly ceased at the first rumour of war.

I always affirmed that the national spirit in Russia is great and straightforward. If you could have seen what was going on in the square before the Palace on the day of the declaration of war, when the people, moved by the high, sincere, patriotic feeling of love for their native country and the Tsar, went down on their knees before the Emperor as he came out on the balcony. The silence was deep, solemn, absolute, no exclamations, no speeches, no cheap effects. It was a grand historical moment of close union between the Tsar and his people. Such a nation cannot be defeated. I am proud to bear the name of a Russian."

Gourakin had stopped eating and sat looking straight before him with a thoughtful and serious gaze.

Mimi was listening and looking at him, and in her heart rose and grew a feeling of emotion and deep respect for this man, so near and dear to her, who was showing her the unknown side of his multiform personality.

"I have great news for you, my dear," said Gourakin after a short silence. "Boris is going to the war, the house will be free, and I have decided to organize a hospital in it for, say, seventy-five beds. Naturally, I shall undertake the equipment and maintenance. . . ."

"Take me as partner," interrupted Mimi.

"Excellent. Well, you see, I hope that you will undertake the rôle of organizer and manager of the hospital, as I certainly will be going to the war."

"You are going?" said Mimi in a low voice, with changed face.

"Could you doubt it? I am strong and healthy, and it seems to me not so very old," smiled Gourakin.

"Yes . . . yes, certainly . . ." answered Mimi absently, her thoughts intent on something else. "Listen, papa; in that case address yourself to Aunt Marie regarding the hospital; I am certain she will gladly consent to arrange it, and with Miss Robinson's help will be able to set it going in the best order. If you are going then I also shall go, as Sister of Charity . . . my place is there. . . ."

"Right you are . . . quite right," said Michail in a moved voice, laying his hand on Mimi's shoulder. "Yes, my

darling, our place is there; I am happy and proud that you so understand it."

He was gazing at Mimi with the deep, intent, caressing look that was one of his chief charms.

"It seems to me," he continued with a slight smile, "that your late mother was mistaken, and that you are still my own daughter. We have so much in common together."

Mimi could find no answer. She took his hand from her shoulder and softly rubbed her cheek against the palm. It seemed to her that the far-off days of their heart-union and tenderness had again revived.

"And so—'*Allons, enfants de la patrie, le jour de gloire est arrivé*' . . ." sang Michail softly, rising from the table. "I am going to Aunt Marie now; where shall I leave you?"

"I am going there with you."

Mimi did not want to part with Michail, so as not to destroy the suddenly revived intimacy of their former relations.

"Very well, let us go to Aunt Marie and discuss the hospital question at once."

Half an hour later they were entering Marie's room. Refreshed by a bath, well tended by the English lady, Marie was reclining on a sofa, her feet covered with a rug, and sipping tea of *fleurs d'oranger*. Very much aged she looked, and resembled her mother to such a degree that Gourakin, struck by the likeness, stopped in the doorway.

"Aunt Marie, I feel as if I see *grand'maman* before me. . . . How you are like her! . . ."

"Mishenka, how are you, my dearest? Oh, what happiness to be here with you all once more! What a nightmare we have been through! Sit down—sit down nearer."

Marie embraced her nephew fondly, and could not restrain her tears.

"Mimisha has come also? Fresh as a rose, while I am quite undone, quite old. . . . Ah, Misha, how terrible a misfortune is this war! The Germans have become brutes. Do you remember how mamma never liked them, and was always disputing with Baroness Kern concerning their civilization. She was right, quite right. On leaving

Ems, we were obliged to pass the night in a shed! Ah, what a night it was! We were driven in, a guard was placed over us, as over criminals. If you had seen our dear old Lvoff! He came with us from Ems. Always so elegant, *tiré à quatre épingles*, smelling of violets, and suddenly—a night in a shed on dusty straw! He was pitiable, poor old man!"

Marie relieved her heart by relating all the details of their risky voyage, in which by a lucky chance they had managed to escape many of the indignities suffered by other Russian travellers.

Through the open window a distant rumbling sound was heard.

"What is that?" asked Marie anxiously.

"Probably a patriotic manifestation."

Gourakin leaned out of the window. A numerous crowd was coming up from afar, slowly filling the whole street. The noise became more distinct, and soon the solemn strains of the National Anthem were heard; the sounds grew and grew until they burst out into one powerful and unanimous chord, which was borne high up in the bright sunshiny day towards the blue heavens, and filled the hearts of the people with a wave of conscious and high-strung patriotism.

"Our Lord, help them!" whispered Marie, making the sign of the cross with her old hand, so like her mother's, and shedding tears.

Mimi stood beside Gourakin, very erect, greatly touched, with pale face and trembling lips. Tears welled up in her eyes. She raised her eyes to Michail and could hardly keep from throwing herself into his arms in a passionate impulse; he was standing there so straight, and solemnly stern. "Will he come back from there?" The thought rushed through Mimi's brain, and something seemed to quiver and turn cold in her heart. For one imperceptible moment, of which she was hardly conscious, it seemed to her that a fateful shadow had hovered over his high serene forehead.

The crowd with the flags was growing and moving on-

ward like an irrepressible stream, and now the words of the anthem were heard distinctly. The waves of sound seemed to overflow and fill all the space between the earth and the heavens. Several students, walking in front, were carrying a large portrait of the Emperor, and with bared heads, bright inspired faces, eyes luminous with faith and determination, were gazing forward into the far distance, beyond which was hidden the imminent and inevitable fate of each of these young boys who were giving up, for love of their country, their most precious gift—their young life.

On the next day Mimi, Marie, Michail Gourakin, and a large crowd of friends and relations were at the station to see off Boris, who was starting for the front. Boris, in his campaign uniform, handsome, excited, and full of faith in himself and all those who were surrounding him, was gazing with glad astonished eyes at the sad faces of his aunt and Mimi. He was sure that he was going forth to a heroic and victorious future, and in everything and all around him he seemed to see lucky and joyful omens.

Owing to the difference in their characters there was no close union between brother and sister. Mimi had a sensitive heart, capable of deep attachment, whereas Boris was of a colder and more egotistical nature. However, in this hour of separation Mimi gazed with deep sadness at her brother, the comrade of her childhood and early youth. She foresaw the parting with another big strong man, under whose wing her childhood, adolescence and youth had passed so happily.

When the second bell sounded all those who were standing in groups round the departing ones seemed to rouse up. A young woman, with her arms round the neck of a handsome Horse Guardsman, was sobbing loudly, pressing her face to his breast. In another group a small grey-haired old woman, the tears falling from her faded, dimmed eyes as she gazed with a hopelessly sad, heartrending look into the face of a boy-officer, was silently with a trembling old hand making the sign of the cross and blessing his curly young head. This silent grief of old age, without any hopes for the morrow, was more terrible and tragic

than the loud sobs of the young and blooming woman. A stout gentleman with blue eyes and rosy cheeks, resplendent with health and self-importance, was beating his breast with his fist on the well-starched shirt-front and loudly proclaiming his intention to give up to Russia all his strength, to go as a soldier and die for the honour of his native country. He spoke so loudly that everyone turned towards him involuntarily and listened.

"Such a one will talk, and cry out, and remain at home," smiled Gourakin.

The third bell rung. A quiver of pain rang through every heart. Mimi pressed her brother tightly to her heart.

"Write, write, for God's sake, Borenka."

Michail made the sign of the cross over his son.

"With God, my boy. We shall meet soon."

Marie was crying softly, embracing and crossing Boris. A whistle. The train started . . . another minute . . . and noiselessly and smoothly it began to move away. Hundreds of eyes were striving through dimming tears to engrave in the memory the beloved features of the departing ones who were being carried away into the unfathomable distance towards bloodshed, suffering and death.

VIII

In Volynsky's dining-room several persons were seated round a large tea-table. Mimi, grown very thin, with sad and tired eyes, was sitting before the silver samovar and pouring out the tea, which the servant was handing round. Tchagin was there, with his chair very near hers; Volynsky sat at the other end of the table.

"Let me take your place, Mimi; I assure you that I know how to pour out the tea most cleverly," said Tchagin in a low voice, bending over to her so as not to disturb the conversation.

"Why?"—Mimi looked at him with surprise—"do you think that I have forgotten how to do it?"

"Oh no, I only want to help you. You look so tired out. It seems to me you are over-tiring yourself."

"That is true—I am rather tired, but not from work; it is the sight of these poor suffering people. Do you know, they brought us a wounded man to-day, all his thigh was torn out. And his wide-open, suffering eyes! . . . Dreadful!"

Mimi passed her hand over her eyes as if to dispel the vision.

"Have you heard that the Servian Mission has received a communication that the Austrians in bombarding Belgrade have destroyed an infant asylum, over which hung the flag of the Red Cross, and the shells have killed over a hundred children?"

"It is incredible!" said Mimi bitterly.

"We are now witnessing events which for importance and grandeur are unequalled in history," a grey-haired, very pleasant, fresh and vigorous old man was saying in a slow, monotonous voice. He was a member of the Council of Empire and a Marshal of nobility of one of the most im-

portant provinces. He had clever eyes and wore a small beard; all his life had passed in hard, systematic work, without which he could not conceive the possibility of existence. Even now, with a mortal anxiety in his heart for his son, who had gone to the war, not forgetting for a moment his sufferings, he continued to lead his habitual life, full of work and cares.

"For Germany," he continued, sipping his tea out of a glass, "the object of the war is the dismembering and annihilation of Russia. Praise be to God, the circumstances are for the time in our favour; the spirit of the troops is excellent, the battle front in Eastern Prussia extends to a distance of forty versts. Goldap and Arys are occupied by our troops. The retreat of the German corps seemed more like a flight, they say."

"Brussels is taken. That wonderful charming town, they say, is destroyed by the German vandals," said Volynsky, shaking his head sadly, and at the same time gazing intently at Mimi's pale little face across the table.

Her sorrowful, tired aspect was troubling him.

"Yes, Brussels is taken, but centuries will pass and history will keep immortal the memory of the legendary heroic little nation with the great soul," said an old man with overhanging grey eyebrows and enormous moustache, a wealthy landed proprietor, Prince Niéjin, a representative of the Red Cross; in a few days he was starting with a hospital to the front.

"God grant," continued Niéjin, "that the English troops arrive in Belgium! No words can express the indignation that one feels against the cynical conduct of Germany and her infringement of Belgian neutrality which she herself had guaranteed."

The old man knit his grey eyebrows and puffed angrily at his cigarette.

"I consider this cynical infringement of Belgium's neutrality perfectly prepared and preconceived. Germany has attacked Russia, Luxemburg, Belgium, France and Holland for the purpose of supporting Austria's international robbery."

The Member of the Council of State spoke methodically and very slowly, with pauses between the words and a distinct enunciation of each syllable. Laying his hands on the table, he looked straight into the eyes of his interlocutors; his speeches were always listened to with attention and his opinion was greatly prized.

"It is quite right," Volynsky affirmed warmly, "and relying on the words of our Emperor, who promised to carry on the war to the end, we must hope that with the moral sentiments of peace there will be given guarantees against the possibility in future of such international robberies. This war, in which Germany has involved the whole of Europe, will bring an incalculable harm to civilization and culture, and the barbarous methods with which it is conducted by Germany will place the latter outside the pale of international relations."

"Yes, Wilhelm Hohenzollern is personally responsible for the terrible ocean of blood which will flow throughout Europe by his fault," said Tchagin thoughtfully.

The Member of the Council of Empire bent his head for a second and remained silent. The image of blood flowing called up before his mind's eye the figure of his beloved son, and a sharp incontrollable feeling of fear for his life shot through his heart.

"Where is he? How is he? Maybe now, at this very instant, he is wounded, or . . . Lord, save him, Lord, do not let it be!" he cried to God inwardly, with all his heart.

"And to think only that Wilhelm nearly got the Nobel prize for peace, thanks to the intrigues of the Austrian Fried!" said Niéjin, with indignation in his voice, angrily flashing his eyes under their overhanging grey brows. "This man has sullied his people's honour and the honour and dignity of a monarch by the cynical lie that the war was called forth by an attack against Germany. What baseness! A few days ago I had occasion to read the text of the telegrams which were exchanged between our Emperor and Wilhelm on the 17th, 18th and 19th of July. Wilhelm's telegrams bear witness to his Machiavellian capacities. After pressing all the springs of war he warns our Emperor

against the responsibility which the latter is incurring by leading to a rupture of the peace."

"Certainly one may say what one wishes, but there are incontestable documents—namely, I saw with my own eyes a report dated March 19, 1913, drawn up by the German general staff regarding the reinforcement of the German army. There are some clauses which relate to Russia and remove all doubts concerning any so-called fatal combination of circumstances or diplomatic errors. This document, although invested with the strictest secrecy, was, however, at the disposition of the French Ambassador in Berlin."

Volynsky stopped speaking and watched Mimi anxiously, to whom a servant was handing a letter on a silver tray. He noticed that her face flushed when she opened the envelope.

"Nothing bad?" he asked with a slight anxiety.

"On the contrary," said Mimi quickly. "Aunt Marie has sent me a letter from Boris and a telegram from papa—that is, from Michail Vladimirovitch"—she corrected herself and stopped, slightly confused. "Listen to what Boris writes among other things," she said, addressing the whole company and laughing merrily. . . . 'Mostly one feels dull, at times a slight touch of fear, but one is always ready to eat and to sleep!' . . ."

"Certainly that is quite right and very characteristically expressed," said Niéjin with animation. "At the war, if one is not face to face with danger, then one feels dull, and when one is going into battle, then one knows what fear is."

Volynsky rose and passed with his guests into the study, where the conversation ran on the same theme which was occupying the mind of everyone. Tchagin related a revolting story of the rude and inhuman treatment which the Germans inflicted on some of the Russian travellers who had spent thousands in their health resorts. His friend, a chamberlain at the Court, was detained on the way, put into a cattle-waggon in company with some other Russians, shut in, and after a torturous twelve hours' voyage brought to Rostok, where the whole party of forty people were installed in a boys' school, which had been turned into a

prison. There they were all placed together, men and women in one room, and kept so during eleven days. One can imagine the horror of such a situation. When, driven to despair, they asked the officer on guard at least to separate the women from the men by a partition wall, this civilized representative of military discipline answered rudely that for Russian swine this was good enough, as at home they lived much worse. After eleven days of such torture they were separated. The food was worse than for criminals. In a disgusting broth of foul meat they often found worms. All the company consisted of persons of education, who learnt through bitter personal experience how civilized the German nation is.

Mimi, and Tchagin behind her, left the study and went into the adjoining *salon*. The huge sheet-glass windows were open. A warm September night had wrapped the granite of the quay and the Neva in indistinct shadows. The bright lights of the steamers were gliding on the river. It was very still, but this beautiful night did not bring peace to the hearts of people before whose spiritual eyes stood the constant phantom of a cruel and bloody war, brought on by the savage fantasy of a monarch who is staking his own and his people's honour in the intoxication of a non-existent universal power.

It was dark in the room, and only the light from an electric lamp on the quay lay across the parquet of the floor in a dull broad stripe. Mimi went up to the open window and looked out in silence. Tchagin stood beside her, and both were silent several minutes.

"I am sad, Alexander Alexandrovitch—sick at heart. If I could only be off quicker! . . ."

"Yes, I see that you are grieving. But why such faint-heartedness, my dear friend, when it is necessary to preserve all your courage? See, all the Gourakins are offering up in the service of their country their love, forces and wealth: Michail and Boris are fighting, you are going as a Sister of Charity, and even your dear old aunt, forgetting her weakness, gives herself up to the hospital created by your family. You must be happy and proud. . . . I think that your

sadness is the result of a nervous and physical over-exhaustion. You must take more care of yourself and have a rest, especially in view of your coming departure."

Tchagin spoke in a low voice full of sympathy. He took Mimi's hand and pressed it in a friendly grasp. No one knew how to calm and soothe anxiety and sadness like Tchagin. Mimi answered his pressure and sighed deeply.

"No, Alexander Alexandrovitch, it is not that. I feel a sort of sadness without any reason. I experienced something of the sort, not for long, before the catastrophe with mamma. You know well that I was not very deeply attached to mamma, and yet I had a kind of presentiment, especially after our last interview with her. And now again I feel the same sadness, but more insistent, something dark and dreary. . . . Ah, Alexander Alexandrovitch, I am afraid to say out loud what I fear so much. . . . I am afraid for him, for papa. . . . There was something in him, when he was leaving, something so strange, so new."

Mimi's lips trembled, and Tchagin guessed that she was crying by her uneven, gasping breath.

"Don't, Mimi! . . . Why should you explain your sadness in this way? I agree with you that Michail was not the same man we were accustomed to see. You know not less than I that he has a sensitive and very impressionable soul. He has been wholly taken up by the grand and terrible events in the fate of Russia and has completely given himself up in her service. Without the least trouble, even without an effort of his will, he has put aside his own personal life. All his past and present have become swallowed up in the idea of defending the honour of his country. In his most madcap action there was always hidden the large, generous nature of a Russian gentleman, a great soul capable of glorious exploits. The hospital, the *droujina*,* which have swallowed up all his fortune—do not they confirm my words? . . . You fear the something new and stern that you have noticed in him, but it is nothing else than a certain side of his nature which in ordinary life was hidden from us. He has infused into you also the great

* A military unit.—Translator.

and glorious qualities of the Gourakin race: you too are brave of heart and carry your head high and valiantly to meet your fate. I admire you, I rejoice when I look at you, and you see I do not dissuade you from going there, where you will meet with death and terror. In this year of cruel and, as I foresee, heavy trials you must be valiant of heart. Like sound-waves, from each one of us there emanate certain fluids which follow our thoughts as they fly to our fighting brothers. It is not dejection, but vigour, that we must send with those fluids in order to sustain an indissoluble current of moral energy, not only with those nearest to us, but with the whole nation."

"You are right, you are always right, my kind friend. I will throw off this sadness of mine, I will do as you tell me."

Mimi pressed Tchagin's hand again, and was conscious of a flow of warm friendly feeling to this unalterable friend of their family.

IX

After all the troubles and worries connected with their dangerous voyage from Germany to Russia, and the nervous strain, a reaction set in, and Marie Gourakina fell seriously ill. The departure of Boris and Michail to the war, the anxiety about them, the forthcoming parting with Mimi, all helped to increase the strain on the sick nerves, and Mimi, in spite of her passionate desire to follow Michail, put off her voyage until the recovery of her aunt.

The war events developed rapidly. The whole Russian Empire was joined in one great tense effort of the will, born of patriotic feeling and the consciousness of a common responsibility for the issue of the national war. Political parties had disappeared, dispersed were different societies of grimacing persons, lovers of cheap stage effects with flabby imagination, lacking the ethics of beauty, always tormented by the desire to draw on themselves the attention of the crowd, no matter what degree of development it had attained. Allayed were enmity and discords. All Russia, tense and thoughtful in the days of anxiety and trouble which had united everyone, roused herself, made the sign of the cross, and simply and piously set forth to take her place on the grand historic battle-field.

Young girls and women of all conditions, on all the degrees of the social ladder, with feverish haste went in for training, donned the garb of Sisters of Mercy, and with meekness and patience tended the wounds of the suffering heroes of Russia. All Russia, from palaces to the poorest huts, seemed to be united in one large sorrowing heart....

By the end of September Marie Gourakina began to recover, and Mimi fixed the day of her departure for the beginning of October. Her preparations were simple. Besides the joy of having attained her object, Mimi was

buoyed by the hope of seeing her brother and father, who, according to certain calculations, were supposed to be in the same region where she was going.

Volynsky appeared to be suffering most deeply of all at the thought of the coming separation from his daughter, who had given him the warmth and beauty of a real home. He was very much excited over her preparations, repeating that she was not taking enough with her, ordering her campaign trunks and bags himself, and often breaking off suddenly in the midst of a conversation to fix on her a sad intent look. All his life he had hidden deep in his soul any feelings of his, and worn a mask of cold, impenetrable reserve, and now it seemed he was tired of submitting his love for his daughter to cold reasoning and he surrounded her with the most tender care and solicitude.

Mimi was looking forward to the day of her departure with a feeling of dread. She feared the parting at the station, the tears which would be shed on her account, the void which she would leave in the hearts of Volynsky, Marie and Tchagin. Notwithstanding all the preparations, the day of departure passed as in a dream, owing to the hurry and the chaos of different unfinished affairs. A sigh of relief burst from Mimi's breast when at last the train began to move and she, in her costume of Sister of Mercy, with burning, tear-stained eyes and two hectic spots of fatigue on her cheeks, sank down on the seat in the compartment and looked around her. Beside her sat a small, wrinkled old woman, thin, pale, in deep mourning. Two weeks ago her eldest son had been killed, and she was now going to Grodno to her second boy, who was dangerously wounded. Sorrow, deep and silent, without wailing or tears, was to be felt not only in each feature of her face, but also in each movement, in the intonation of her low sad voice, with the sound of stifled tears in it, in the soft folds of her black gown.

The other lady, solid, not young, and energetic, with a faded but attractive face, was going to Bielostok also to see a wounded son. She was the first to engage in a conversation with Mimi and the old lady, and all the way she kept

up the spirits of the company in the car. The knitting-needles were flying in and out between her quick, short and strong fingers. With skill and dexterity she unpacked the tea things out of a capacious bottle-case and hospitably treated her companions to tea and a whole supply of good things. The fourth occupant of the compartment was a handsome Cossack with black eyes, white, even, strong teeth and a noble-looking profile. He was returning to the front after a short leave of absence, during which he had gone to Petrograd to bury his old father.

Each of them had his own personal grief, and one in common, which united them all. The only theme for conversation was the war. At each stoppage the people returning from the army communicated some news, sometimes joyful, sometimes alarming. The name of the High Commander-in-Chief was mentioned by all with feelings of admiration and gratitude. The journey to Warsaw took a tedious forty-four hours. The way was constantly blocked up by military transports. The train had to stop during long dull hours at railway-stations encumbered by other trains with cargoes and troops. Anxious-looking men in uniform and sheepskin coats moved to and fro; Sisters of Mercy, with black and white kerchiefs on their heads and the red cross on their breasts or sleeves, were conferring with officials, proffering requests, or patiently awaiting events seated on their travelling bags. The railway administration was quite knocked up trying to satisfy and to help everyone. At Vilna the sad news arrived of the death of the youthful Grand Duke owing to a mortal wound. All the faces looked grieved, all were sorry for the valiant youth, stricken down by the enemy's bullet.

At the stations between Vilna and Warsaw the public was exclusively military, and one felt the throbbing pulse of the war. The most contradictory, nonsensical reports of our colossal victories or our defeats were caught on the wing, and in a moment made known to all the crowd, greedily listening for any news from the battlefield.

Mimi decided to stop for a day in Warsaw, to ascertain where the army was in which Michail and Boris were serv-

ing. The aspect of the station, encumbered by a crowd of moving, hurrying, frightened people, astonished Mimi. The enemy had approached to a distance of nine versts, and the inhabitants were fleeing in a panic out of the town, carrying with them all that they possibly could. Those who lived near Warsaw fled to the town from their estates. Mimi, nearly lost in this ocean of frightened people, with her hand luggage in her hand, moved slowly step by step, reached the doors at last, found a cab, and ordered the coachman to drive to an hotel. The streets of the town presented an aspect of indescribable chaos and confusion. Endless baggage trains were moving, crowds of frightened people carrying most extraordinary things were hurrying by, military automobiles were droning piercingly in high or hoarse sounds, a continuous, uninterrupted hum from the crowd and noise of wheels filled the air. Mimi's cabman made his way to the bridge with the utmost difficulty, but the bridge itself was encumbered with the baggage trains, troops of soldiers, and intermixed with all this was the common crowd, screaming, swearing, or making trivial, spiteful jokes in regard to the trains or the advancing enemy. For one second the cabman drew in the reins and then deviated slightly from his way; Mimi saw a dying horse lying heavily on his side, with sunken flanks and a pitifully, helplessly extended thin face. With its lank benumbed lips the poor animal had caught up a handful of hay that some pitying hand had thrown to him in the last minutes of his life.

"*Eh-ma*, thou poor one! What a place thou hast found to die!" a young and vigorous voice, full of compassion, was heard to say quite near to the carriage. Mimi looked towards the voice; it came from a rosy-cheeked young soldier with merry eyes and an unconcerned expression on his face totally out of conformity with the general confusion and alarm.

Mimi drove from hotel to hotel and could not find a single room. They were all overfull. She called up several of her acquaintances on the telephone, but everywhere she heard the same answer—"Gone."

At last, in a distant by-street, in a dirty and miserable-looking hotel, she managed to obtained a small, disgusting-looking room with torn faded paper on the walls, a crooked mirror, suspicious bed-linen, and a close, sickening smell in the corridor. She took the room for a fabulous price and went off immediately to the Governor-General, hoping to ascertain from him something regarding the whereabouts of Michail and her brother. A tremendous crowd of Jews were besieging the citadel, clamouring for their documents. They were Jews of all ages and conditions. Their changing and mobile faces expressed alarm and humiliation. Pale, in their long national coats, with the curls behind their ears, skull-caps, guttural speech and angular movements, they produced an oppressive effect on Mimi.

The Governor-General did not make Mimi wait. He advised her not to lose a minute in leaving Warsaw for Lublin, where at that moment Gourakin's army was sure to be. Half an hour later Mimi was driving up to another station after having fetched her things from the hotel. It was getting dark, and the dreadful, unimaginable uproar and commotion of the many-thousand crowd oppressed her like a nightmare. The cabman had to stop at a distance from the station, as it was only possible to press through the multitude of baggage trains, automobiles, Red-Cross carts and cabs on foot. In a fever of haste, fearing to be late for the train, her white head-shawl floating behind her, Mimi plunged into the chaos of men, horses and vehicles. At the station she got hold of the station-master and asked him to assist her and get her a place. This functionary, a friendly and energetic man, called for his assistant and charged him to do his best for the "little Sister."

At midnight, deafened by the noise, Mimi, thanks to the kind attentions of the railway administration towards Sisters of Mercy, found herself in a waggon. Women, men, children, dogs, were streaming in, pushing and pressing on one another in their fear of being left behind. Through the windows bags, sacks, bundles, carpets, curtains, cases were being thrown in anyhow. They all lay in heaps in the corridors, frightening the little ones and

making them cry; all seemed to be talking at once, all the faces wore an excited, alarmed look. The lucky ones managed to secure seats. Most of the people were standing in a compact crowd in the corridors and on the platforms of the cars.

At eight in the morning the train stopped at Siedletz. Again an enormous crowd, again a rush and press, feverish anxiety and alarm on all the faces. Mimi, with the help of an officer, managed to obtain a glass of tea and some bread. In the refreshment-room the crowd was intense. Hands were extended over the heads of those in front trying to get a piece of bread or cake; the fee was laid down on the counter without being counted. The whole stock of provisions was swept up in a few minutes.

With stoppages and delays the train arrived at midnight at the junction Lukoff, where Mimi had to take another train.

Pushing her way through a crowd of excited, noisy Jews, Mimi managed to find a place for her things. It seemed totally impossible to ascertain when a train was starting; some said that it would be in the morning, others spoke of the next day. It was cold and piercingly damp. Mimi was shivering, her teeth chattering as if with fever. She felt immeasurably tired. The station-master, hearing her request, promised to get her a place, but he could not undertake positively to do so in a short time.

After many trials, and without the possibility of finding a seat for even a few minutes, Mimi at last met with two officers of the Grodno Hussars and turned to them for help and advice. She was simply dying of fatigue and exhaustion, and, like everyone else in this time of calamity, she did not make any distinction between friends or strangers all seemed to have become near to each other and easy of access.

"To Lublin? Very well," said one of the Hussars with a polite bow. "We are going the same way. The station master has just told us that he will try to send us off with his wife and a Sister of Mercy. Evidently he spoke of you little Sister!"

After several hours of anxious waiting the station-master announced, with a pleasant smile at the handsome "little Sister," that an engine and a goods-waggon was ready for them. He conducted them through by-ways along a distance of reserve tracks, and amid the darkness and noise of clashing buffers, the smoke and steam of engines, whistles and signals, he found an engine with a luggage-van attached to it. With great difficulty Mimi managed to scramble in. Besides herself and the two Hussar officers, there was the young wife of the station-master and the tall Colonel whom Mimi had seen all the way from Petrograd to Warsaw. The door of the van was rolled to with great clatter, and the whole company found themselves in complete darkness. By the help of a pocket-lamp some ends of candles were found. In their dim light the men proceeded hastily to turn out their camp beds and get out some warm wraps and things. It was terribly cold in the car. The Hussars were putting up a bed for Mimi with brotherly solicitude; the Colonel was doing the same for the station-master's wife.

"A regular infernal cold! Devil take them, putting ladies into such an ice cellar!" one of the officers was swearing while wrapping Mimi's feet in a warm rug. Mimi, smiling feebly, thanked them for their care of her and assured them that she was not cold, and feeling very comfortable on the narrow camp bed which one of them had lent her; but in reality the frost seemed to pierce the very marrow of her bones, and, notwithstanding her great fatigue, she could not sleep. The candle-ends soon burned out, and the darkness filled the cold frozen wooden waggon. Thoroughly chilled, Mimi forgot herself in a heavy doze, but when she opened her eyes in the utter blackness of the night she could not make out where she was. What was rumbling so? Why was it so cold and so dreadfully dark?

In the early morning their train stopped. It appeared that they were not far from Lublin, but the way was blocked and they had to wait. All were thoroughly benumbed with the cold. With pale tired faces, trying to put themselves in order, the two ladies, wrapped up in the felt cloaks which had been lent them, sat on the folded camp

beds and waited patiently for the end of their trying journey.

At last the train moved on again, and at eight in the morning it stopped at Lublin. The Hussars, on hearing that their regiment was in the neighbourhood of the town, bade a hearty adieu to Mimi and went off in search of it.

At the station Mimi learnt that the staff of the army, in which Gourakin's troops were incorporated, had arrived at Lublin the day before, and this information gave her added courage. She decided, after a rest, to resume her inquiries. But a new impediment arose: she could not find a cab. A long time elapsed, until at length some workman, for a considerable sum, brought her one. The aspect of the small provincial town astonished Mimi—it was boiling over with life. Elegant automobiles were rushing hither and thither; the streets were filled with officers of the Guards. Again there were long trains of luggage-vans, soldiers were passing on, but there was none of the blind, disorderly chaos that was felt in Warsaw. Here life was flowing on in an energetic stream. It was not easy to find a shelter; not only all the hotels but all the private apartments were overfilled with people. Suddenly Mimi saw a Horse Guardsman in the street, a comrade of Boris, who had just recovered from his wounds, and was in Lublin on the way to the army. Mimi was very glad to meet him. From him she learnt that according to all probability the division of her father was not far from there. He gave her the address of a house where she would be able to find a room in a family of his acquaintance, and promised to call on her after midday to assist her in ascertaining where and how she could find Gourakin.

X

THE halting stage hospital of the Lublin Red Cross section was established in the building of an ancient former Catholic Church, and was divided by a small garden from the public square. On receiving information regarding the whereabouts of Gourakin's division, Mimi hastened to the hospital to obtain leave of absence for several days. The old building was very gloomy. The gate, ensconced in a deep dark niche in the wall, opened into a courtyard planted around with old shady trees. Directly opposite this gate a heavy door led to a steep dark staircase. The windows of the hospital looked out on one side into this courtyard and on the other into a large shady garden.

In the reception-room Mimi was met by the founder of the hospital, a lady greatly loved and respected by the whole town. She fully sympathized with Mimi's wish to see her father, showed her over the whole well-organized hospital, where there were about a hundred wounded men, wished her a speedy return, as the number of Sisters of Mercy in the hospital was insufficient, and bade her a hearty good-bye.

As it was impossible to get an automobile in the town, either for love or money, Mimi without losing time set out beyond its precincts to where the last Automobile Company still remained.

It was quite dark when, after a muddy shaky drive, she reached the house where the chief of the Automobile Company was quartered. He was not there, and she sat for more than an hour in tedious waiting in a cold half-empty room lit by a solitary candle. At last an officer entered with an energetic expression of the face. On the following morning at daybreak the Company was to start for Radom, where Mimi was going.

The officer promised to take her there. Thoroughly tired out, but very pleased with the results attained, Mimi went back to the small clean room which she had engaged in the house of a solitary lady.

For about three hours Mimi slept like one dead, but the moment that dawn began to break she jumped up, dressed quickly, and moving softly down the squeaking, winding stairs she brought down her portmanteau and travelling bag, opened the house door noiselessly, and went out into the street. The cold autumn air pierced her to the bones. Tired out by a whole series of sleepless and anxious nights, Mimi felt herself trembling all over. After waiting several minutes and beginning to feel alarmed, she at last heard the noise of approaching wheels. The cabman whom she had engaged the day before drove up. It was not yet five o'clock when Mimi reached the barracks of the Automobile Company. All around was dark and silent; no sign of movement anywhere.

Mimi learnt from a sullen sleepy soldier who was carrying a pail of water that they were not starting before seven o'clock, as there had been so much to do last evening that the chief of the Company had only gone to rest after three in the morning. Having paid the cabman, and placing her luggage on the ground, Mimi sat down on a large stone near the building. Lifting up her shoulders and drawing in her neck, with her hands thrust into the sleeves of her coat, Mimi sat there with closed eyes and a pale tired face. All around was grey, dim and cold. Scraps of clouds were moving low and rapidly. The lonely house in the midst of the empty expanse stood out like a dark spot. The wind was raising the dust and seemed to be bringing up rain. Mimi was full of a heavy, heartrending sadness. All her surroundings were so unlike what she had seen all her life. . . . How could it have come about that she, brought up in a rich home, surrounded with luxury and care, was sitting cold, tired and lonely on a stone in the middle of a field and waiting anxiously the awakening of a stranger officer to go off far away, into a distance full of the dread, mysterious terrors of war, where the guns were roaring, shrapnel and

bombs bursting, where every second her father—yes, he was her father in her heart—might meet with his death. "And this is not a dream . . . this is not delirium . . . this is life! . . . Oh, my God, what a terrible word—life!" thought Mimi and, opening her eyes, looked with an indefinite unknown feeling of awe into the far sky. Dark, lowering, it was silent, cold and unfriendly.

At that moment human life seemed to Mimi so insignificant, so transient, so indistinct and confused. In her strained, nervous state, she seemed to see the invisible, to embrace with her glance vast spaces. In the damp daybreak cowering over the earth, she saw countless crowds of tired, chilled, tortured men, made unhappy by a mysterious bondage, which sent them forth from their homes into damp trenches, with heavy jingling weapons in their benumbed and frozen hands. . . . To-day, to-morrow, the day after, for weeks, for months, these unhappy men, obedient slaves of their own errors and deviations from the simple clear laws of nature, will destroy each other and, dying, ask themselves with sorrow and horror, "Why? What for?" And never, even with their last breath, will they find an answer, even as she cannot find it in the far heavens on which she is gazing. . . .

At seven o'clock an automobile was allotted to Mimi. A dexterous soldier chauffeur, placing some things on the front seat, worked the engine quickly and adroitly and declared that it was ready to start. Mimi shook hands with the chief of the Company and thanked him, and, wrapping her feet in a rug, ensconced herself into a corner of the motor-car. They drove out on a bad causeway, and very soon the feeling of sadness in Mimi's heart increased from all that she saw out of the window of the car. Long rows of carts were dragging along the road; inside, huddled together, with pale anxious faces, sat whole families of refugee Jews—old men, young men and children, and behind them their poor belongings, old and shabby. The poor horses and cows, the last blessings of the refugees, were attached to the waggons and moving sadly along. Crowds of Austrian prisoners, with stolid misery, were

marching by apathetically; some were lagging behind, others catching them up. One was munching a piece of bread, another was gnawing at a bit of foul carrot which he had pulled out of his pocket, a third, covering the small flame with his palm, was endeavouring to smoke a cigarette which he had made. In their faded grey-blue cloaks and caps they looked pale, weary and pitiful.

Sometimes Mimi met automobiles with officers, Sisters of Mercy, and wounded, and then again rows of waggons with straw at the bottom. These were full of wounded soldiers, covered with their coats. Bound up heads, arms, feet . . . it seemed as if they were all pale ghosts, not living men.

"My God, my God, what horror, what suffering!" whispered Mimi, and tears of pity for all these tortured maimed men poured down her cheeks.

The waggons and the automobile had to stop at times, to let pass some cart in which sat a doctor, Sisters of Mercy, or a priest.

With a movement of horror and disgust Mimi saw in a ditch near which they had stopped a dead horse with one side torn out. Two dogs, with gnashing teeth and tucked-in tails, were tearing away bits of flesh, propping themselves with their forepaws against the bared bones. The automobile moved onwards. They passed the abandoned houses of deserted villages . . . a country seat—white columns, nailed windows, an avenue of shady trees a century old, a moss-grown pond—the sadness of ruin and desolation; farther still, a destroyed factory. They passed Kuroff and the Jewish cemetery. Other scenes of ruin and dilapidation began to appear more frequently. The signs of the passage of the enemy were more visible and heavily felt. The automobile turned to the left and took the road to Novo-Alexandria and Ivangorod. They passed through villages with numerous isolated soldiers, who were catching up their units, some lounging about or occupied in mending their clothes or cooking their food. In the Jewish hamlets Mimi was deafened by the dreadful noise and hubbub. Everyone seemed to be screaming, crying, stamping about in the mud amid the ruined houses; dogs were

barking, children crying; the automobile was surrounded by them, and could not move forward.

They entered a dirty little town with nailed-up houses, a great number of hospitals, and crowds of soldiers. It was Novo-Alexandria. Traces of the enemy's passage were seen at every step. Everything was partly ruined and destroyed. Soldiers were bustling about and moving to and fro in the streets; one of them was carrying a teapot with boiling water, another was squatting down before a small fire and cooking some food; near the halting-station wounded men in their bandages were sitting or crawling about. The automobile cautiously passed down the descent to the Vistula, and Mimi saw the funnels of two drowned steamers sticking out of the water. The bridge across the Vistula had been destroyed, and they had to cross on a pontoon bridge. Mimi got out of the automobile and went on foot. The sun looked out from behind the clouds, and the scene of desolation looked still sadder under the bright caressing rays.

As soon as they had crossed the Vistula Mimi was astonished to see the endless number of trenches. They ran along the whole *chaussée* and in all directions; intersecting each other, they encircled the forest which was seen in the distance. The causeway was so dug up and mutilated by the enormous shells of the German guns that the car could only move very carefully; nearly at every step they came upon deep, treacherous holes. The field, all overturned, not by the diligent hand of the ploughman, but the revengeful hand of fratricide, lay black and gloomy, encircled by the line of forest in the distance.

Mimi constantly shut her eyes and frowned with pain at the sight of the dead horses lying on both sides of the road, with their sunken sides and terrible outstretched faces with bared teeth. Very often they now met with parties of workmen repairing the road. The villages were totally burnt down; instead of a row of cottages only the dark, half-burnt chimneys were to be seen. Along the road they saw many Catholic crosses and "brother" graves. Some of them bore simple wooden crosses, others only a stick—

grave after grave, making the heart still sadder, calling to Someone in dumb sorrowful protest. . . . Under the fresh mounds of earth lay hundreds, thousands of men, who had silently and meekly given up for the sake of an idea the most precious gift of nature—life. . . . Mimi crossed herself, and the tears ran and ran down her cheeks.

They reached the halting stage, Zvolen. Endless mud and countless numbers of shouting, gesticulating and excited Jews. From here the wounded were sent off in different directions. The soldier chauffeur asked permission to stop to ascertain the way to Radom. Mimi opened the door and was just stepping out when a very youthful volunteer approached her.

"Excuse me, little Sister, that I address you," said he, blushing and looking rather confused. "I have been wounded; now I am recovering, and I want to catch up my company. Your chauffeur told me that you are going to Radom. For God's sake, take me with you. There is such a chaos here that I cannot get even a simple cart."

The volunteer was looking at Mimi with such entreating eyes that she hastened to reassure him, and gladly offered him a seat in her motor-car.

On ascertaining the way they moved on farther. The volunteer appeared to be a very nice young man. They found that they had some friends in common. Mimi felt cheered, and the time passed quicker in conversation. She produced chocolate, biscuits, caramels.

"Ah, look, what a horrible sight!" cried Mimi, pointing to a small house razed to the ground and destroyed by shells.

"Do you call that horrible?" The young man smiled a pale and pitiful smile. "We have seen sights much more horrible than that."

Mimi's heart beat very strongly when they were approaching Radom. Her head was feeling giddy from the endless rows of waggons, the shouts and noise. The car moved on with difficulty. The Automobile Company, which had caught them up, was seeking for a shelter and could not find any. Mimi and the volunteer descended on

to the square and made inquiries right and left regarding the whereabouts of the different regiments. Mimi very soon ascertained that Gourakin's division had moved farther on, but no one could indicate where it was at the given moment. Her heart sank, and she suddenly felt such an insurmountable moral and physical exhaustion that it seemed to her that she could not make another step. Driving back her tears, she desired only one thing at that moment—to find some refuge and have a long sleep. She had to search for one a long time. The volunteer did not leave her side. At last, through the intermediary of the chief of the Automobile Company, also a very obliging and nice man, Mimi found a room with a Polish family, where the daughter, a pretty, quiet young girl, gave up her own bedroom to her. Totally broken in spirit from all that she had seen on the way, Mimi bade farewell to her young companion and, undressing and washing herself, lay down on the soft clean bed, where she was soon sound asleep for the first time after many nights.

It was past one o'clock when a quiet knock was heard at her door. Mimi could not understand at once where she was and whose was the unknown pretty and gay little room. Then memory came to her; she jumped up and put on her dressing-gown.

"I had to wake you, little Sister," she heard the voice of the pretty little Polish girl behind the door. "In an hour's time your friend, the officer of the Automobile Company, Vastchenko, will be here. He asked us to tell you that he has some commissions in Lublin and that he has to start back there to-day; perhaps you would like to go with him."

"Oh yes, certainly. . . . How kind of him! I shall give you a hearty, grateful kiss,'" said Mimi, combing her golden hair, which was hanging in long waves down her back.

Pretty little Yuzia hurried to the dining-room to get some breakfast for Mimi, who had inspired her with great admiration for her handsome face and her costume of Sister of Mercy. Mimi was touched by the cordiality of these strangers. The old parents of Yuzia were kind and

friendly people. While Mimi was lunching they related to her all the horrors that they had gone through. The old lady, wiping the tears from her eyes, stroked with a trembling hand the black locks of her little daughter.

"She is our only one, all our joy is in her. . . . How we have feared and suffered for her God alone knows!" said the old lady.

Soon after lunch Vastchenko came and told Mimi that if she wanted to go with him she was to be at the station, where the automobile would be awaiting them. Again Mimi plunged into the noise and commotion of the crowd, of endless officers' and soldiers' caps, shawls of the Sisters of Mercy, Jewish long-tailed coats, automobiles, filling the narrow streets with their piercing calls.

The officer of the Automobile Company was waiting for Mimi at the doors of the station. He helped her to take down her things from the cab and asked her to wait for him a few minutes in the waiting-room while he went to give some last orders before starting.

"The railway has been so destroyed by the enemy," said he, catching up with his strong muscular hands Mimi's portmanteau and travelling-bag, "that there is no other communication with Lublin than by motor. I will now arrange all and come for you, little Sister."

Mimi passed into the waiting-room, and there she at once made out the Colonel of Gourakin's division standing with his back to her. Full of joy, she ran up to him and touched him on the sleeve of his coat. He turned to her with his hand to his cap.

"Colonel, what luck to meet you!" said Mimi with a red flush of excitement which made her pale face look suddenly animated. "I am here seeking for my father—he is the Commander of a *droujina*—Michail Vladimirovitch Gourakin. Cannot you give me some news of him? I arrived here yesterday, and heard with despair that your army had moved somewhere further. Will you not help me, Colonel, to find my father?"

Mimi spoke rapidly, trying to make him understand as quickly as possible.

"You are his daughter? Allow me to present myself," the Colonel gave his name. "We are great friends with your father. I think that it would be best to go to Lublin, as he was slightly wounded and taken there."

"Wounded? . . . Papa wounded? . . . Oh, my God!" Mimi turned so pale that her face looked quite white.

"Tell me the whole truth—he is killed? Do not torture me."

"I give you my word of honour that he was wounded. I was near him yesterday when he was being taken away in an automobile."

Mimi's lips were trembling and her eyes were dim with tears. She did not notice a slight hesitation in the Colonel's answer.

"He was wounded in the legs. I am happy to make the acquaintance of Michail Vladimirovitch's daughter and to tell her that her father is a hero. In the open field, with the bullets raining on all sides, he saved three wounded soldiers, carrying them out of the region of fire on his giant shoulders; while he was carrying the fourth one a shell burst near his legs and he was struck down."

Mimi listened with emotion and despair at her heart. Now she had only one acute, torturing desire—to get back to Lublin, find Michail as soon as possible, and not leave him any more. All the impressions of the last days, all her thoughts, were centred now in the fear for the life of her dearest and nearest one. The whole world, with all its horrors and sorrows, seemed to pass away beyond Mimi's consciousness. It seemed to her that the whole complicated chain of events of the great war was leading only to this event, which was of so awful an importance to her.

"Is he seriously wounded?" asked Mimi in a stifled voice, raising a singularly absent look to the Colonel.

"Yes, it seems he was seriously wounded."

Catching sight of Vastchenko, who was looking for her, Mimi bade good-bye to the Colonel and with a feeling of cold and void in her heart rapidly went out at the door.

XI

On returning to Lublin and leaving her things with the owner of the room she had engaged, Mimi went in the automobile to the Red Cross hospital, where she hoped to find out by telephone whither Michail had been taken.

The door in the niche fell to with a dull sound as Mimi entered into the courtyard of the hospital. The trees were swaying with a mournful sound, and the dry leaves rustled in the dark under Mimi's light and swift footsteps. The second door leading to the dimly lighted staircase closed behind Mimi, and she ran up the steep steps with an anxious feeling of something dreadful and important before her. She pushed open a door in front of her and stopped on the threshold.

"Help, quicker, hold him . . . the head, the head—hold it!" a Sister bending down over one of the beds whispered to her in a hurried whisper.

Mimi took a step forward and suddenly saw a deathly pale head hanging on one side, with large horror-stricken black eyes, and clenched teeth shining strangely white between the thin bluish lips. Black locks of hair fell on a white high forehead, cold as marble. Quickly and carefully she took in her warm dexterous hands the head of the dying man. The Sisters were trying to rid him of his torn, muddy blue cloak. He was not groaning, but his eyes, full of terrible suffering, were more tragic than the moans and groans which were issuing from the breasts of the wounded just being carried into the hospital. Near them the Sisters of Mercy were bustling about noiselessly and hurriedly.

"The syringe—quicker with the syringe . . . scissors . . . cut the cloth . . . help me . . . hold here . . . wadding—wadding for God's sake," one of the Sisters, with a

severe tense expression of suppressed agitation on her face, was saying to someone.

Mimi did not hear anything; she only saw those dreadful eyes of a man dying in awful suffering fixed on her and at the same time the acute and aching pain in her brain, which she had felt from the moment of her meeting with the Colonel at the station of Radom, grew worse and worse. It seemed to her that ill-omened signs were enveloping her, that someone's cold, inexorable hand was leading her, as though in a nightmare, to some awful depth, full of terrors and darkness. Something heavy and gloomy was coming down on her, and she was conscious that she had no power to avert it, and struggle and avoid it as she might, it would reach and crush her. Without turning her eyes away she gazed into the distended pupils full of a mortal agony, and the horror of the inevitable filled her soul.

"Put down his head, you need not hold it any more . . . he is dying," someone said near Mimi's ear.

She obediently lay down this head, already touched with the coldness of death, on the pillow, and without looking around her went out into the waiting-room. A doctor was sitting there, and by the light of a lamp under a green shade was writing something on a large sheet ot paper.

"Doctor, please advise me how to find out this very minute where I may find my wounded father—Michail Gourakin."

The doctor raised his eyes to Mimi. She stood before him so white and pale and cold that he looked at her attentively.

"Michail Gourakin—the commander of the *droujina?* The Equerry at the Court? Is he your father?"

"Yes."

"He is here. . . ."

"Ah! . . ." Mimi caught at her heart and swayed, but controlled herself immediately. "Seriously wounded?" she asked, scarcely audibly.

"Yes, he is very seriously wounded . . . in the stomach . . . be brave. . . ."

How she got to Gourakin's room, who conducted her there, how she entered, Mimi did not know. Something was carrying her, pushing her towards the inevitable, which was going to crush her with its weight. And she was going, hurrying to meet it . . . and suddenly she saw a pale, stern-looking profile, with the aquiline nose, and two arms extended along the counterpane. Without a tear, without an exclamation, Mimi fell on her knees at the bedside of her father, her only father, and seemed to comprehend suddenly that the inevitable had occurred. . . . Laying both hands on the immovable one on the bed and hiding her face in a corner of the pillow, Mimi seemed turned to stone, struck down, annihilated by grief. The Sister of Mercy who was nursing Gourakin stood over her and with her hand on Mimi's hair looked on with silent sympathy at this scene of dumb despair. . . .

When Mimi rose from her knees her eyes were dry and burned with a strange weird light.

"Thank you, dear Sister; now I will stay with my father," she said. "Does he suffer much?"

"Yes. He is unconscious now. We have just made an injection. He has peritonitis."

The Sister gave Mimi the necessary instructions and left her alone. Moving her chair near the bed, Mimi sat down and without taking her eyes off Michail's face sat thus one, two, three hours. . . . Sometimes he moved his head and moaned weakly. Mimi, keeping her breath, bent over him, but his face, pale and stern, remained unchanged, and his eyes closed. The minutes and hours went by. . . . The light of the small electric lamp hanging from the ceiling was shaded by a piece of green tissue paper on the side where the bed stood, so that the room was divided into two parts—one full of light, the other in a soft semi-obscurity. Behind the windows the wind was rustling the branches of the tall old trees which stretched their half-bare arms towards the window. All the noises of the night outside, all the sounds and low moans in the house, spoke to Mimi of something that she could not understand, but

to which her frightened, grief-benumbed soul had to submit.

Suddenly Gourakin opened his eyes and looked straight at Mimi.

"Papa! . . . Papa! . . ."

Mimi bent low over him.

"Lit . . . tle . . . Sister," said Michail in a very low voice.

"Papa, dearest, my own . . . it is I—Mimi."

For a second Michail shut his eyes.

"Ravings . . . again . . . Sister. . . ."

"It is not delirium . . . I have come, I am here with you, my dearest papa."

Mimi's tears were falling with a slight sound on the pillow of the sick man.

"The Sister of Mercy on duty has gone, my darling, and now I am going to be with you all the time—not a moment will I leave you . . . it is I, it is Mimi."

Michail, as if verifying his own impressions, and to be sure that he was not delirious, looked intently at Mimi.

"And where is Aunt Marie? . . . Where is Boris?" he asked distinctly and scarcely audibly.

"Aunt Marie is in Petrograd. She does not know yet that you have been wounded. When it will be possible I will take you there. Boris is all right, but I have had no time to see him. I have just come."

"My darling . . . you are with me . . . I shall not die alone. . . ."

With sad eyes, in which, beside love, there was shining something else, new and awesome, Michail was gazing into Mimi's eyes and with weak fingers pressing her hand.

"Papa darling, are you suffering?"

"At present . . . no. . . ."

Michail sighed, closed his eyes for one moment, and was still, but the light pressure of his fingers on Mimi's hand told her that he was conscious.

"Life is over . . . I am dying . . . my child . . . always dear and near to my heart . . . remember always that I loved you most of all in life. . . ."

The slight semblance of a smile illumined the stern face of the dying man.

"As I have loved you, my beloved, my only papa," answered Mimi, keeping back the up-welling, disobedient tears and tenderly pressing her lips to Michail's hand.

"I have a weight on my soul. . . . If I only could . . . take back the letter . . . my last letter to your mother! . . . That is my sin . . . my heavy sin. . . ."

"The Lord will forgive you, my dearest one. You have done no harm to anyone, you always have been kind. You are wounded because you have been saving others. You will be forgiven—I believe firmly, I know the Lord will forgive you. I will pray for you, all my life I will pray for you. . . ."

"Yes . . . darling . . . pray for me. I believe and I repent. . . . In the morning call the Father-confessor. . . ."

Evidently he was losing strength. The last words were hardly to be heard. In a few minutes Michail began to moan weakly, to toss his head about on the pillow, and to rave indistinctly, pronouncing short, incomprehensible phrases. His face looked sterner, the nose became sharper and looked as though it were carved in delicate ivory. In the middle of the night the sufferings increased. Mimi rang. The Sister of Mercy who had been nursing him entered quietly, stood a little while over him, and told Mimi that she would call the doctor. The doctor came in, and the sick man became suddenly quiet. The doctor felt his pulse, and without a word looked at Mimi; seeing on her stony face a speechless, terrible despair, he sat down on the chair near the bed.

Out of the dying lips came one or two moans, disjointed ravings, the name of Mimi. . . . He threw his head back and opened wide his eyes. In the distended pupils fixed on Mimi was the same expression of suffering, the terror of death that she had seen a few hours ago in the eyes of the dying Austrian officer. Then the eyes grew dim, closed, the whole body quivered once, and stretched. . . .

The doctor touched Mimi's shoulder softly.